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# **The many facets of mindfulness as a tool to manage work-related stress**

From the implications under neoliberalism to the  
struggle of “being” in a capitalistic world

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*Alla mia Famiglia, alla vita, e a me, con l'augurio di  
non perdere mai quella curiosità che ci rende vivi...*

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# 序言

我论文的中心是对正念从起源到现代应用的概览。正念作为一种现象，正被学者们越来越多地研究，不仅是作为一个独立的学科，而且是作为在特定意识形态或经济体系（如新自由主义和资本主义）的背景下使用时所能产生的影响和所能呈现的形态。更具体地说，在这里，主要的分析对象是看看正念是如何被世界各地已经工业化的国家的公司采用的。我之所以决定分析这一现象，是为了发现并更广泛地理解一种植根于佛教的实践是如何随着时间的推移而演变和转变，进入西方世界，更具体地说，进入商业世界的。显然，随着全球化，世界发生了重大变化，人们被要求发展适应不断变化的环境的能力，技术进步已经达到并逐步影响了许多国家的工作场所、工作条件和工作关系。因此，员工的工作压力似乎在上升，公司登记的高缺勤率，低敬业度和职业疾病，如焦虑，抑郁或心脏相关的问题似乎是一个主要问题。在对正念作为一个独立的学科和目前在全球工作场所注册的与工作有关的压力统计数据进行了首次简要介绍之后，我认为观察公司是否感到有必要围绕人力资本进行重组，重新配置社会契约以保护工人而不是工作，重新设计在公司内部执行的政策，并促进健康项目以解决与工作有关的压力问题将是有趣的。此外，本论文旨在探索正念在新自由主义下的影响，以及它需要如何调整以适应以经济自由化政策为特征的社会和经济，如放松管制、自由贸易、私有化、全球化和减少政府支出，以增加私营部门在经济和社会中的作用。最后，我的分析想要发现或至少试图强调专注力传播的任何相关趋势，这取决于不同种类的资本主义，也就是说，理解专注力干预在某些国家更普遍存在或更需要的事实是否源于该特定国家的资本主义形式。换句话说，我想分析正念与资本主义之间的纽带，正是这种纽带使得两者能够共存。

第一章提供了冥想和正念的定义，以便让读者对这个话题有更广泛的理解。由于这两个词经常被混淆和用作同义词，这一章一方面概述了冥想的起源，并详细描述了冥想可以采取的所有不同形式，其中最重要的是正念冥想，另一方面，它还通过在冥想和正念之间的差异基础上对正念进行定义和背景化，以澄清问题，并避免未来对这两个概念的任何误用。虽然第一段集中在这种现象的历史根源上，本章的最后一节集中在这种传统和古老的实践中更现代和创新的方面。事实上，随着正念在全球范围内的传播，一个名为“冥想市场”的全新市场出现了，并能够蓬勃发展，这要归功于冥想应用程序的兴起，反过来，这些应用程序让人们可以随时随地获得正念和冥想。因此，最后一段也通过分析数据和趋势深入探索了冥想应用程序的市场，以理解这一现象的规模。

继续到第二章，注意力指向工作压力和正念之间的现有关系。一旦定义为第一个，工作场所压力的原因和影响在此特别提到了倦怠综合征，根据世界卫生组织，倦怠综合征是“一种被定义为由长期工作场所压力导致的综合征，但没有得到适当解决”（世卫组织，2019年）。全球分析和咨询公司盖洛普和欧盟职业安全与健康信息机构职业安全与健康办公室(OSHA)发布的两份不同的官方报告证明了近年来与工作有关的压力不断增加，导致员工敬业度下降。本章的第二部分其中讨论了正念在工作场所的有效性，它是管理与工作有关的压力、焦虑症状和职业疾病的创新工具。此外，相关重要的是基于正念的协议，特别是 Jon Kabat-Zinn 的 MBSR(基于正念的压力减轻)，即将正念作为情绪管理和压力减轻的自我调节方法的方法。

第三章介绍新自由主义的意识形态，以便理解它与正念的关系。我在此研究了新自由主义治理下正念的特点，其中个人主义的概念发挥了非常重要的作用。事实上，本论文试图实现的目标之一是理解在工作场所中使用的正念是或应该是个人的责任，因此是在该特定环境中工作的员工，还是公司的责任。此外，注意力被放在分析企业渴望得到的结果上。他们真的对员工的健康和幸福感兴趣吗？还是正念只是另一种资本主义的企业战略，旨在实现公司利润和结果的最大化？

第四章可能是最具挑战性的一章，因为在正念和资本主义绝对可以共存的前提下，它旨在发现一些正念练习是否可以与某种特定的资本主义相关联。因此，本章首先处理所有不同种类的资本主义的分类和描述，然后，为了试图观察正念在国家间传播的趋势，我将尝试观察正念和它在世界某一特定地区所需的程度是否取决于该特定国家具体的资本主义种类。

最后一章，第5章，处理案例研究，试图分析在现实世界背景下，在工作场所实施正念是否已经成功和有效。这里介绍的案例研究是“Fratelli Branca Distillerie”的案例，这是一家意大利家族企业，在烈酒行业领导了175年，感谢它的正念领导者 Niccolò Branca，他通过冥想经历了漫长的自我认识和自我意识的旅程，能够围绕人力资本蓬勃发展和重新设计公司；谷歌，一家美国跨国科技公司，Jon Kabat-Zinn 为其首次开发了 MBSR 协议；SAP，一家德国跨国企业软件公司，由于其出色的工作场所文化、管理风格和福利倡议，已被评为德国“第一最佳工作场所”。通过这项工作，我希望揭示正念在企业层面的目的，它的性质，无论是个人主义还是集体主义，以及当它在公司的商业战略和幸福投资组合中实施时，它代表员工甚至整个公司产生的结果。

## **Introduction**

A general overview of mindfulness from its origins to its modern application as a phenomenon that is being increasingly studied by scholars not only as a standalone discipline, but also for the effects it can have and the shapes it can assume if employed in contexts characterized by specific ideologies or economic systems such as neoliberalism and capitalism respectively, is at the center of my dissertation. More specifically, here, the main object of analysis is to look at the way mindfulness is adopted by companies of already industrialized nations worldwide. The reason why I decided to analyze this phenomenon is to discover and have a broader understanding of the way a Buddhist rooted practice has evolved and transformed overtime to enter the Western world and more specifically, the world of business. Clearly, following globalization, the world has undergone significant changes, people have been required to develop the ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment, technological progress has reached and progressively affected many countries modifying as a consequence, workplaces, working conditions and work relationships. As a result, workplace stress appears to be on the rise amongst employees, with companies registering high degrees of absenteeism, low engagement levels and occupational illnesses such as anxiety, depression or heart-related problems seem to be a major issue. After a first brief introduction on mindfulness as a standalone discipline and on the current work-related stress statistics registered across worldwide workplaces, I believe it would be interesting to observe whether companies have felt the need to reorganize around human capital as to reconfigure social contracts to protect workers rather than jobs, to redesign the policies to be implemented within the firm and to promote wellness programs in order to tackle the problem of work-related stress. Additionally, this thesis aims to explore the effects of mindfulness under neoliberalism, and how it needs to be adjusted to fit into societies and economies characterized by policies of economic liberalization such as deregulation, free trade, privatization, globalization and reductions in government spending to increase the role of the private sector within the economy and society. Lastly, my analysis wants to detect or at least tries to highlight any relevant trend in the spread of mindfulness depending on the different varieties of capitalism, that is to say, understanding whether the fact that mindfulness interventions are more present or needed in some countries is due to the form of capitalism of that specific country or not. In other words, I would like to analyze the bond between mindfulness and capitalism that makes it possible for the two to coexist.

Chapter 1 provides a definition of both meditation and mindfulness in order to give readers a broader understanding of the topic. As these two words often happen to be confused and used as synonyms, on the one hand this chapter offers an overview on the origins of meditation along with a detailed description of all the different forms this practice can assume, amongst which the most important of all is mindfulness meditation, on the other hand, it defines and contextualizes mindfulness also by underlying the differences between meditation and mindfulness as to clarify on the matter and avoid any future misuse of these two concepts. While the first paragraphs concentrate on the historical roots of the phenomenon, the last section of the chapter focuses on a more contemporary and innovative aspect of such a traditional and ancient practice. In fact, following the spread of mindfulness on a global scale, a whole new market which took the name of “meditation market” arose and was able to flourish thanks to the rise of meditation apps that, in turn, grant people access to both mindfulness and meditation anywhere and at any time. This last paragraph thus explores the market of meditation apps in depth also by analyzing data and trends in order to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon.

Moving on to Chapter 2, attention is directed toward the existing relationship between work-related stress and mindfulness. Once defined the first, causes and effects of stress in the workplace are hereby described with particular reference to the burnout syndrome which, according to the World Health Organization, is “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been properly addressed” (WHO, 2019). Proof of the increasing work-related stress in recent years with a consequent decrease in employee engagement is then provided by two distinct and official reports released by Gallup, a global analytics and advice firm and OSHA, the European Union information agency for occupational safety and health. The second part of the chapter concentrates on the effectiveness of mindfulness in the workplace as an innovative tool to manage work-related stress, symptoms of anxiety and occupational illnesses. Furthermore, of relevant importance are the mindfulness-based protocols, in particular Jon Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction), namely methods to employ mindfulness as a self-regulation approach to emotion management and stress reduction.

Chapter 3 introduces the ideology of neoliberalism in order to comprehend what relates it to mindfulness. I herein studied the characteristics of mindfulness under neoliberal governmentality, with the concept of individualism playing a very important role. As a matter



of fact, one of the goals the present dissertation tries to achieve is that of understanding if mindfulness employed in workplaces is or should be a responsibility of the individuals, hence employees working in that specific environment, or if it is a company's duty. Moreover, attention is placed on analyzing the outcome businesses desire to get. Are they really interested in their workforce's health and well-being or is mindfulness just another capitalistic corporate strategy aiming to maximize the firm's profits and results?

Chapter 4 may be the most challenging one as, with the premise that mindfulness and capitalism definitely can and do coexist, it aims to discover whether or not some mindfulness practices can be associated to a specific variety of capitalism. Therefore, this chapter first deals with the classification and description of all the different varieties of capitalism, then, in an attempt to observe trends in the spread of mindfulness across countries, I will try to observe if mindfulness and the extent to which it is required in a specific area of the world depends upon the variety of capitalism specific of that particular country.

The last chapter, Chapter 5, deals with case studies in an attempt to analyze whether or not the implementation of mindfulness across workplaces within a real-world context has been successful and effective. The case studies herein presented are those of "Fratelli Branca Distillerie", an Italian family-owned company leader in the spirits sector for 175 years, which, thanks to its mindful leader Niccolò Branca who went through a long journey of self-knowledge and self-awareness through meditation, was able to flourish and redesign the company around human capital; Google, the American multinational technology company where and for which Jon Kabat-Zinn first developed the MBSR protocol and SAP, a German multinational enterprise software corporation which thanks to its outstanding workplace culture, management style and well-being initiatives has come to be ranked Germany's "Number One Best Place to Work".

With this work, I hope to reveal the purpose of mindfulness at the corporate level, its nature, whether it is individualistic or collectivist and the results it produces on behalf of employees or even companies as a whole when it is implemented in a company's business strategy and visioned in its well-being portfolio.

# **Chapter 1 - From meditation to mindfulness**

## **1. Origins and definitions of meditation**

According to the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Meditation is a discipline comprised of a set of self-regulation practices that train awareness and attention to keep mental processes under greater voluntary control to promote general psychological well-being and development and to foster mental abilities such as concentration, calmness and clarity (Walsh R., Shapiro S.L., 2006). Among the several categories falling under the domain of meditation, mindfulness, defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment,” has been studied a lot in recent years (Kabat-Zinn J., 2003). But before understanding mindfulness and the reason why it has generated increasing scholarly attention, it is important to analyze meditation.

Scholars struggled with defining meditation, since nowadays it takes on characteristics and connotations that go far beyond its original conformation, but from what we know, it has been practiced in many religious traditions since ancient times including Buddhist, Hindu, and Indian, just to name a few (Max, 2020).

The first testimonies of the birth of this practice date back to the Hindu principles of Vedantism, which then spread to other cultures, finding application in other fields besides the spiritual one, such as those of business and health (Elaine Mead, B. S.; 2019).

In fact, meditation appears to have several physical and psychological health advantages, having among its main objectives to reduce stress, depression, anxiety while increasing self-consciousness, perception and well-being of the individual.

In order to understand the idea behind this broad concept and the characteristics it encompasses, we should analyze in depth the meaning of the word meditation itself. For what concerns the etymology of the word “meditation”, evidence suggests that it comes from the Old French term “meditacioun”, which in turn, derives from the Latin “meditatio” from the verb “meditari” meaning “think, contemplate, conceive, meditate” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018). Therefore, the rather introspective and individual character of this practice seems to be intrinsically implied even in the single unit of the word.

Aside from its pure historical connotation, the term meditation is used to refer to all the spiritual practices of Eastern origins, so-called “dhyana” in Hinduism and Buddhism which derives from the Sanskrit root “dhyai”, literal “contemplating” or “meditating”. It might be

also employed to refer to practices of Islamic Sufism or other traditions such as Jewish Kabbalah and Christian Hesychasm (Max, 2020).

Despite its Eastern traits and the fact that it has been essentially developed in East-Asian countries, meditation is rapidly spreading to the West and truly becoming a worldwide incident with over 50 million meditators around the globe, and a multitude of books as well as workshops on the matter (Lukoff et al., 1993; Kelly, 1996). Meditation is no new phenomenon as well as it's no news that meditation is one of the most powerful wellness trends in the modern society. In the span of just a few years, it has come to be identified as one of the three fundamentals of well-being together with healthy diets and fitness exercises.

At first glance, what hides behind meditation seems simple, rather banal: sit still, focus on breath, reflect. But, even though activities and ways of meditating look as if they were easy enough for anyone to perform them, in reality the practice of meditation is, or perhaps we should say has recently become, much more complex than this. As a matter of fact, it is rooted in a deep cultural history that has seen the practice shift from a religious idea to something that now seems to be more stylish than spiritual.

It is true that plenty of people still meditate for religious reasons, but these days, the practice has been following the example of yoga, thus becoming a secular chic and fashionable trend, as dedicated meditation studios open in big metropolis like New York and Los Angeles. Even Equinox, a well-known fitness company with gyms across North America and Great Britain, has launched a class under the name of HeadStrong, combining high intensity interval training with meditation. The trend has also kept the pace of technology, adopting the latest with apps like Headspace and OMG. I Can Meditate!, both of which have signed partnerships with famous international airlines such as Virgin Atlantic and Delta in order to offer in-flight meditation options (Ross A., 2016).

According to Lodro Rinzler, author and 'Chief Spiritual Officer' at the Manhattan studio MNDFL, which opened back in 2015 "It used to be that if you wanted to try Tibetan Buddhism and meditation, you had to travel all the way to Tibet, and if you wanted to try Korean meditation, you had to travel all the way to Korea. But now you can go to neighborhoods in New York and do both in an hour" (Ross A., 2016). His statement really captures the idea that meditation is now of and for everybody, no matter where you find yourself in the world. Nowadays, we can affirm that meditation has undergone a process of structural change, since it has experienced a transformation in its structure and fundamentals which was at first conceived as a religious tool to be used in order to achieve awakening or enlightenment and now has switched to a more pragmatic, but at the same time apparently

more frugal dimension with the advantage of having turned into an accessible anywhere and by anyone phenomenon.

Robert Puff, a blogger at “Psychology Today”, claims that some archaeologists trace the birth of meditation back to the 5,000 BCE, and the practice itself has religious ties in ancient Egypt and China, as well as Judaism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and, of course, Buddhism. He also suggests that meditation’s global spread came along with the Silk Road around about five or six centuries BCE, as the practice moved throughout the Asian continent. It travelled from country to country and as it reached a new place, it would slowly redesign in order to fit and match each new culture. But it was only with the advent of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it began to move beyond the realm of specific religions, especially in the Western world (Puff R., 2013). Due to its changing conceptualizations together with the changes in its objectives over time, scholars have had difficulties in providing a unique and universal definition to meditation as a standalone discipline, as it covers a wide range of different practices within the aforementioned traditions. However, the Cambridge Dictionary defines meditation as “the act of giving your attention to only one thing, either as a religions activity or as a way of becoming calm and relaxed,” or “serious thought or study, or the product of this activity” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Meditation has been given a lot of different definitions with respect to each distinctive author, practitioner, researcher, and teacher. While William James, American philosopher and psychologist, in his *Principles of Psychology*, defined meditation as “voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again” (James W., 1950), McGreal claimed that the practice is “the shifting of the focus and awareness from the outside back to the inside, and by looking within, feelings, habits and inclinations themselves will be surpassed to a point where all experiences are unified” (McGreal I.P., 1995). Furthermore, Walsh described meditation as the “conscious training of attention aimed at modifying mental processes so as to elicit enhanced states of consciousness and well-being” (Walsh R., 1982). Therefore, those variations in the meditative interpretation can hinder the categorization as well as reaching the conclusive and general definition. However, McNaughton through his research has made an attempt in order to classify meditation into three types: concentrative, mindfulness (awareness/insight) and integrated. Concentrative meditation refers to a technique that emphasizes the concentration of attention in which the focus is placed on one single thing or object, such as Transcendental Meditation. In mindfulness meditation, thoughts, sensations and/or the events around the meditator are watched vigilantly, continuously and successively. Lastly, integrated meditation is a combination of the previous two techniques (McNaughton R.

D., 2003; Goleman D., 1988). Scholars argue that this difficulty in defining meditation univocally lies in recognizing the peculiarities of multiple and diverse traditions and how, aspects such as theories and practices, can differ within the same tradition.

When practiced on a daily basis, meditation can have lots of mental as well as physical benefits. As stated by Michael Miller, the director of the New York Meditation Center, based on some studies, meditation can help improve creativity and critical thinking. Furthermore, it can be useful to reduce stress, enhance and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

A recent research conducted by The Permanente Journal provides evidence of the fact that meditation can indeed help in reducing stress at work.

Also, according to Harvard research, sick employees suffering from various conditions such as depression, psoriasis, fibromyalgia, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc can also take advantage of meditation.

The Wellness Institute at Cleveland Clinic also discovered that mindfulness-based methods such as meditation can help in reducing stress levels most especially for people who are involved in demanding jobs because it can make them happier and more engaged (Duffy J., 2020).

One of the most common issues we face nowadays is the serious confusion that arises around how the terms “meditation,” “mindfulness” and “mindful” are used. As a matter of fact, these three get often used interchangeably, when supporting general agreement and scientific research show that there are three core types that entail different practices, all of them having different impacts on the brain, and different outcomes: 1) focused attention 2) open monitoring (which includes mindfulness meditation) and 3) self-transcending meditation. In the recent meditation boom, the different varieties of mindfulness meditation referred to as the act of paying attention in the present moment without judgment have become dominant, and this has led to a conflation of all meditation with mindfulness. And if mindfulness meditation is a real practice, through the commodification of “mindful everything,” it has become a fuzzy adjective and lifestyle trend applied everywhere (McGroarty B., 2019).

In today’s complex society, rates of anxiety and depression are flying around the world. Globally, one in six people suffers of at least one mental or substance abuse disorder, with anxiety disorder ranking first (WHO, 2017). In the UK, 67% of people report that they’re more stressed than they were five years ago (Headspace, 2018); in the US, major depression has increased by 33% since 2013 and up to 47 percent for millennials (Blue Cross Blue Shield The Health of America, 2018); in China, 40% of the adult population reports to experience a lot of stress daily (Lyons, L. & Liu, D., 2016). While studies on different types

of meditation's impact on stress and mood need to test types head-to-head, the research on various meditation types' impact on stress and mood is too promising, and the world is desperate for low-cost solutions with no side effects. So many early studies suggest this: from those indicating that meditation produced changes in brain circuits involved in regulating emotion to those showing that mindfulness meditation reduced stress markers, such as cortisol. The cost of all this stress—as it's the seed of so many diseases from high blood pressure to Alzheimer's—is simply unsustainable. And calming our “gotta, gotta, gotta” minds will not only drive growth in all “meditations,” it will drive the study of which ones work best for individuals (Kaliman P, Alvarez-López MJ, Cosín-Tomás M, Rosenkranz MA, Lutz A, Davidson RJ., 2014). Understanding the 3 core types of meditation & their brain impact becomes more important.

Roth argues that to ground our understanding of meditation and its effects, we should first embrace a three-type meditation classification paradigm: 1) focused attention 2) open monitoring and 3) self-transcending. While there are hundreds, if not thousands, of meditation practices and brands, the three categories analyzed below represent the generally agreed-upon and best-studied mechanisms that are operating across the increasingly crowded meditation landscape. All are legitimate techniques involving different practices and outcomes. (And all have benefits—you wouldn't want to choose between Vitamins A, C or D). Most meditations will activate more than one of those mechanisms or exist on a continuum between open monitoring and focused attention.

More head-to-head studies on these core types are starting to clarify how they impact the brain and the benefits they have. A 2017 Max Planck Institute research studying brain MRIs compared focused attention and open monitoring meditation against each other, finding that these types of meditation are associated with changes in different brain regions (Valk, S. L., Bernhardt, B. C., Trautwein, F.-M., Böckler, A., Kanske, P., Guizard, N., Collins, L., & Singer, T., 2017). An earlier study was the first to analyze the impact of the three meditation types on electrical brain waves, whose frequencies correlate with a different state of consciousness (Travis F, Shear J., 2010). There are five brain waves, each with a distinct purpose—from fastest to slowest they are Gamma, Beta, Alpha, Theta and Delta.

## **1.1 Types of meditation**

Is not made of one single purpose, does not target people in the same way and there is no single type of meditation, but different and many kinds of meditation over time were brought to life. The reason why this happened is to be found in the different characteristics all these

forms might entail and in the diversity of effects and outcomes towards which all these meditation practices can lead. In order to better understand in what aspects these do differ from one another, we are going to make a categorization of them and delineate their specific traits.

Spiritual meditation is one of the most diffused as it is practiced in nearly all regions and spiritual traditions. Because of their broad and widely spread application, it experiences mutations depending on where it is to be implemented and it shapes around the local culture and set of beliefs proper of the places it moves. According to a study of 2017, spiritual meditation is about developing a deeper understanding of religious or spiritual meaning and connection with a higher, supranatural and omniscient power. This practice has benefits for those people interested in spiritual growth and seeking a deep connection to a spiritual force (Burke, A., Lam, C.N., Stussman, B. et al., 2017).

Movement meditation includes many habitual activities such as walking, gardening, yoga and tai qi. This is an active form of meditation in which the individual is guided by movement towards establishing a deeper connection with the self and the present moment. Therefore, it is appropriate for those who want to find peace in action and want to develop body awareness (Bertone, H. J., & Hoshaw, C., 2019).

Transcendental Meditation (TM) is important and one of the types of meditation the vast majority of people practices, and it has also been the subject of numerous studies in the scientific community. Founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi it refers to a specific practice designed to quiet the mind and induce a state of calm and peace through the use of mantra. It is best if taught by a certified TM practitioner. This practice targets people who want an accessible approach to the depth that meditation offers (Orme-Johnson, D. W., & Barnes, V. A., 2014).

Focused meditation involves concentration by using any of the five human senses which are hearing, eyesight, taste, smell and touch. This practice might be simple in practice, but it is difficult to be put in practice since beginners, struggle in maintaining the focus for more than a few minutes. Such practice is of help for individuals who want to sharpen their focus and attention capabilities (Bertone, H. J., & Hoshaw, C., 2019).

Loving-kindness meditation intensifies feelings of kindness, compassion and acceptance towards oneself and the others, thus, as such, it might be ideal for people holding sentiments of anger or resentment (Nunez, K., 2020).

Mantra Meditation is performed through mantras, words or sounds repeated to aid and redirect concentration in meditation which originate in Hinduism and Buddhism. The mantra

can be recited either out loud or quietly, in either ways it will allow the practitioner to experience deeper levels of awareness (Raypole, C., & Legg, T. J., 2020).

Progressive relaxation also referred to as body scan meditation aims to reduce tensions in the body and promote relaxation. This form of meditation is used commonly to relieve stress and unwind before bedtime (Raypole, C., & Legg, T. J., 2020).

Visualization meditation focuses on enhancing feelings of peace, and calmness by the visualization of positive images. It is about imagining a scene vividly and using all five senses to see it as much detailed as possible. It can also involve holding a beloved or honored figure in mind with the intention of embodying their qualities. Another form of visualization meditation involves imagining yourself succeeding at specific goals, which is intended to increase focus and motivation. People through practicing visualization meditation might be able to boost their mood, reduce stress levels, and promote inner peace (Raypole, C., & Legg, T. J., 2020).

Mindfulness meditation builds upon Buddhist teachings and is the most popular and researched form of meditation in the West. It is a way for individuals to pay attention to thoughts as they pass through the mind in a non-judgmental and detached manner. You simply observe and take note of any patterns. This practice is the perfect combination of concentration and awareness. Mindfulness meditation is good for people who do not have any guidance, as it can be easily practiced alone (Gelles D., n.d.).

The latter is the form of meditation I am going to analyze in this dissertation as it is tied to stress-related matters and to the world of management and economics.

## **1.2 Mindfulness meditation**

Amongst all the above-mentioned different types of meditation, one of the most important is mindfulness meditation. But if we were to provide a definition of mindfulness meditation, what would it be? We can state that mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice teaching the individual who performs it to slow down racing thoughts, let go of negativity and calm both the mind and the body (Cherry K., 2022). This spiritual practice is a combination of meditation and mindfulness themselves and involves deep breathing and awareness of body and mind. It is scientifically proven that a regular practice of mindfulness meditation entails some benefits for both a person's physical and mental health. In particular, if practiced constantly, mindfulness meditation can have the following benefits:

- It can reduce stress (Chiesa A, Serretti A., 2009)



- It can lower heart rate (Monahan M., 2019)
- It may improve immunity by increasing one's body's resistance to illness (Barrett B, Hayney MS, Muller D, et al., 2012)
- It might improve sleep quality (Rusch HL, Rosario M, Levison LM, et al., 2019; Creswell, J.D., et. al., 2019; Black, D.S., et. al., 2016; Creswell, D. J., & Khoury, B., 2019)

But, although some of us may think this is a randomly performed practice, on the contrary, Chade-Meng Tan assures us it follows a precise, clear and straightforward process. First, mindfulness engagement starts with an intention or a reason or even better, a purpose which is supposed to generate habits; psychological practice and disposition will then enter the game every time an intention is manifested. Secondly, attention is converged, it acts like a night watchman by controlling all your personal thoughts and emotions. The third step is the one in which ruminations and fantasies might happen and it is often referred to as distraction stage with cognitive process. At this stage, attentional focus is required to retrieve by bringing attention back to the process of breathing. The initial purpose and motivation encourage and stimulate practitioners to go on rather than giving up. Last, in the moment an appropriate attitude is established with self-criticism, self-compassion and curiosity, an insight into the practice is fostered and strengthened little by little (Ziegelbecker, T., 2020).

In the next chapter, I am going to analyze how the world of Mindfulness meditation applies to management and how at the same time mindfulness programs are implemented in companies in order to keep work-related stress under control.

## **2. Benefits and effects**

Meditation is defined as the habitual process of training the mind to focus and redirect your thoughts. In recent years, it has become a common and widely diffused practice to such an extent that some people even consider it to be a trend following globalization. After being adopted by the Western culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in fact, meditation was reconfigured to match the objectives of a modern society and it soon became a tool to reduce stress and improve healthy living standards, similarly to the Western version of yoga practice. But what are the benefits and effects hidden behind this popular, globally widespread discipline per se? It is important to understand and analyze the effectiveness of this phenomenon usually used by people in order to embrace a better and more conscious way of living and together with it people are also discovering the possibility, by practicing meditation, to increase self-

awareness, reduce stress and develop concentration. Amongst all the science-based benefits meditation can have on the human brain and body we can state that meditation is helpful in order to:

- Reduce stress
- Enhance self-awareness and improve self-esteem
- Keep anxiety under control
- Lower age-related memory loss
- Promote emotional health
- Lengthen attention span
- Improve sleep
- Generate kindness
- Control pain
- Fight addictions
- Decrease blood pressure

Stress Reduction is one of the main reasons why people decide to practice meditation and other friend-of-the-mind activities such as yoga. Physical and mental stress are usually caused by an increase in the stress hormone, the so-called cortisol which provokes many diseases such as anxiety, depression, blood pressure increase, insomnia etc. Many studies suggest that practicing meditation reduces the inflammation response caused by stress. Some forms of meditation such as self-inquiry meditation for instance may help the practitioner to develop a greater understanding of himself and how he or she relates to those around. Other forms instead, help you recognize those feelings and emotions that might be self-defeating. The idea is that as you gain greater awareness of your thought habits, you can guide them toward more constructive patterns. As we said previously, meditation can reduce stress levels, and as a consequence, this results in less anxiety.

Meditation can also help to develop a better understanding of one's self, increasing the awareness in terms of capabilities, abilities, possibilities and aims one person can pursue and it helps deal with the people around us, recognize harmful or self-defeating behaviors that may damage and discourage people in the process. The idea is that through this discipline one can gradually gain greater control on thought habits and, as a consequence, use them in a more constructive manner. Moreover, meditation practice might cultivate a more creative problem-solving approach to everyday's activities.

Regularly practiced meditation can help reduce anxiety and improve stress reactivity and coping skills. One study found that people with generalized anxiety disorder, a disorder with amongst its characteristics has chronic worry and physiological hyperarousal symptoms, were able to reduce their anxiety symptoms and levels through an 8-week mindfulness meditation program. From this we can jump to the conclusion that some mindfulness and meditation forms can help reduce anxiety levels. Additionally, it may help control job-related anxiety, leading to improved well-being and decreased distress and job strain.

The improvement in attention you can get through regular meditation may stimulate memory and mental clarity. This can be helpful in fighting age-related memory loss and in treating patients affected by dementia. Thus, meditation can also help keep the mind young.

Some types of meditation can have an impact on how humans perceive the external world and the environment surrounding them. In fact, meditators can experience improved self-image and start to have a more positive and optimistic outlook on life. Researchers suggest that meditation can help individuals get rid of negative thoughts and sometimes can also be efficient in dealing with depression.

Furthermore, meditation in general, but particularly the focused-attention kind of meditation practice increases the strength and endurance of attention. In this way, one can focus on the activity and on the present moment, becoming able step by step to concentrate on the task for a longer period of time which might even lead to the completion of the task being performed. One review even concluded that through meditation it is possible to revert patterns in the brain that contribute to worrying, mind-wandering and poor attention kind of behaviors.

Of course, if one person feels relaxed and calmer, this will also have positive repercussions on his or her sleep activity. Meditation in fact can improve sleep quality and help fight insomnia because you become capable of redirecting the runaway or racing thoughts that often lead and characterize insomnia. Moreover, it is beneficial for your body which is more relaxed, for your mind that releases tensions and the combination of these two positive effects puts you in a peaceful state in which you're more likely to fall asleep.

Some forms of meditation may be particular effective in increasing positive feelings and kindness towards the self and the others. The form of meditation which is most invested with this power is the so-called loving-kindness meditation which begins with the development of kind thoughts and sensations toward the self. By practicing meditation, people learn and become capable of extending kindness and forgiveness externally, first to friends, then to acquaintances and ultimately to enemies. More importantly, meditation helps to increase positivity, empathy and compassion which is defined as a strong feeling of sympathy and

sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them and which is the engine for building interpersonal relationships.

Since one's perception of pain depends on the state of mind he or she is in and on the extent to which one's pain tolerance is high, meditation can also help patients cope with painful feelings, thoughts or control pain itself leading to an improved quality of life.

The mental discipline you can develop through meditation may help you fight addictions and break dependencies. Meditation boosts mental awareness and can help people manage triggers for undesired impulses, this can help you recover not only from addictions and dependencies such as alcohol cravings and drugs use but can also help people reduce emotional and binge eating and redirect many other unwanted actions.

Meditation can also have benefits on physical health by reducing strain on the heart, thus reducing blood pressure.

Last but not least, most importantly meditation is a practice accessible anywhere since the vast majority of its forms does not require specialized equipment and spaces. There are two main styles of meditation we know of: the first is called focused-attention meditation and redirects attention on one single object, sound or thought. It concentrates on letting the mind free from distractions. Meditation may focus on breathing, mantras or calming sounds. The second is referred to as open-monitoring meditation and it is best known for encouraging broadened awareness of all aspects of your environment, train of thoughts and sense of self. It may have to deal with suppressed feelings and emotions (Thorpe, M., & Link, R., 2020).

If, on the one hand, meditation can influence physical health, evidence and critics have questioned, on the other hand, the commercialization and the over-marketing of the meditation phenomenon.

### **3. Origins and definitions of mindfulness**

“Mindfulness”, defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn as the practice of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally” (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994), has become increasingly popular in mainstream culture over the last decade to such an extent that it seems to have become a real worldwide trend. But where does this word and concept or better “state” come from? The English terms “mindfulness”, “mindfully” and “mindful” are not new, in fact they've been in use for hundreds of years, but they were never explicitly associated to any type of meditation practice before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Mindfulness” was the word, a noun, chosen by the religious scholar Thomas Rhys Davids for translating into

English the word “Sati” of the Pali language, which is the language used in the central texts of the Theravada stream of Buddhism. “Sati” is an essential concept in the Buddhist tradition, part of the seventh element of the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path (“right Mindfulness”).

According to the author of “Mindful America” published in 2014, Jeff Wilson, three main forces pushed the mindfulness movement towards the mainstream awareness and these forces all came out in the 1970s. Something like three generations of mindfulness going from its most traditional and original context and then moving towards a modern conception of this phenomenon which has become a tool of and for the masses. The first force driving this shift was the vipassana meditation movement. Vipassana is the Pali word for “insight” and has come to be associated to an approach to meditation and dharma teaching that emerged in Myanmar at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and transformed into a popular meditation movement. In the Pali canon, Vipassana is a quality of the mind which develops through meditation coupled with samatha (calm abiding) as part of the path to enlightenment (Tricycle, 2020). The second push came from the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Naht Hanh whose studies and books focus on the discipline, Buddhism and peace. The last force was Jon Kabat-Zinn who shaped the scientific credibility of mindfulness theories in the Western part of the world. Even though Jon Kabat-Zinn studied together with Buddhist teachers, and he has formulated different meditation techniques from many Buddhist traditions, the medical Professor is not a Buddhist. He instead graduated in molecular biology from MIT and became interested in studying the health benefits of mindfulness by adopting a scientific method or approach. By observing that people appeared to benefit both physically and psychologically from long spans of time spent on focusing and redirecting their attention to the present moment, he founded a famous mindfulness program, or mindfulness-based protocol that was dislocated from its religious roots under the name of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Winter T., 2016). Its characteristics and implementation will be explained in depth in the Chapter 2. Now, coming to the question: what is mindfulness? And what is the meaning of it, how can we define mindfulness in the first place?

According to the definition provided by Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom.” (Mindful Staff, 2017). It revolves around two basic concepts: awareness and concentration. Awareness can be defined as nothing more than the ability to act intentionally, directing a timely but non-judgmental look at everything you do, say or think.

Concentration on the other side is the positive effort of the mind that trains to direct focus to its objects in a pure and authentic way, without the interference of any thoughts affected by past experiences or projections on the future.

Mindfulness though is a discipline that teaches to grow attention in a wise, healthy and clean way. It aims to know the self and the world around us for what they really are: looking at them with acceptance, learning to be and live the present moment and lead a life without stress, one step at a time. If it remains anchored to what happens here and now, the mind expresses its full potential by working with the only possible material: the reality of what is there at the moment it arises. In doing so, the mindful person does not get tired in pursuing the past and the future, he or she does not bother to regret, suffer from uncertainty and confrontation, frustration, anxiety and the many conflicting emotions that everyday life engenders. Opening ourselves to reality without distractions is the fundamental condition for understanding ourselves and others, as we are and as they are, and making every form of suffering an experience of openness of tenderness, a reason for contact with the profound dimension of being alive, fearless.

And again, we should ask ourselves what mindfulness really entails and implies.

Mindfulness is an articulated practice on meditation. It is a training based on specific exercises involving the body and the attention whose purpose is to cultivate the habit of awareness to achieve a mental state to achieve satisfaction and happiness. A Tibetan proverb says: there is no meditation as such, only the fact of getting used to it. This phrase suggests that mindfulness is not a static practice but instead requires energy, effort, time, intention, determination, will and discipline. Given these fixed points, the constant exercise of Mindfulness is articulated in directing attention to the present, moment by moment. To keep attention levels high, a person can use the following tools:

- The body (paying attention to the breath, to some specific areas or to the body in its complexity);
- The perceptions of the senses (all that is collected by the senses, that is, hearing, sight, touch, smell, taste, and by the mind) that offers a physiological, physical or psychological response to what we like, what we dislike and what arouses indifference;
- Mental emotions-formations (mental constructs that follow the perceptions of the senses, such as anger, desire, pain, compassion);
- The objects of the mind (what, in a concrete or abstract sense, arouses the mental formations after being perceived by the senses: I want to possess something that

arouses my desire after the eyes have grasped the beauty, applies to objects but also to conditions).

Observing this concatenation of phenomena, from its physical dynamics and without expressing any positive or negative judgment, promotes in the long run a state of unresponsive calmness, an empty space between occurrence and subjective response that allows the mind to face the present for what it is, without overloading the reality of further additional suffering derived from expectations, thoughts and judgments (Istituto A.T. Beck, 2021).

Evidence suggests that mindfulness is an Eastern phenomenon due to its Buddhist origins, but it has, in recent times, moved to the West, adopting new characteristics and experiencing some changes in its original configuration (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). The Buddhist and Western conceptualizations of mindfulness differ in three ways: contextual, process, and content. At the contextual level, mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition is viewed as one factor of an interconnected system of practices that are necessary for attaining liberation from suffering which is the ultimate aim of spiritual practitioners in the tradition. Therefore, it needs to be cultivated alongside with other spiritual practices, such as following an ethical lifestyle, in order for one to move toward achieving the goal of liberation. On the contrary, Western conceptualization of mindfulness, usually does not depend on any specific circumscribed philosophy, system of practices, or ethical code. At the process level, mindfulness, in the Buddhist context, is to be practiced against the psychological backdrop of reflecting on and contemplating key aspects of the Buddha's teachings, such as impermanence, non-self, and suffering. As an example, in the Satipatthana Sutta (The Foundation of Mindfulness Discourse), one of the key Buddhist discourses on mindfulness, the Buddha recommended that one maintains mindfulness of one's bodily functions, sensations and feelings, consciousness, and content of consciousness while observing clearly the impermanent nature of these objects. In Western practice, on the other hand, less emphasis is placed on non-self and impermanence with respect to Buddhism. Finally, at the content level and in relation to the above-mentioned points, in early Buddhist teachings, mindfulness refers to an introspective awareness regarding one's own physical and psychological processes and experiences. This is in contrast to certain Western conceptualizations of mindfulness, which view mindfulness as a form of awareness that encompasses all forms of objects in one's internal and external experience, including features of external sensory objects like sights and smells. This is not to say that external sensory objects do not ultimately form part of one's internal experience;

rather, in Buddhist teachings, mindfulness more fundamentally has to do with observing one's perception of and reactions toward sensory objects than focusing on features of the sensory objects themselves (Keng SL, Smoski MJ, Robins CJ, 2011).

A Swedish study of 2016 conducted by Hakan Nilsson and others, has identified the 5 key-pillars standing at the basis of mindfulness in order to try to provide it with a working definition. These five fundamentals are known under the name of “The Big Five of Mindfulness” and they are:

- Attention and awareness
- External events
- Ethical mindedness
- Cultivation
- Present-centeredness

Attention and awareness are complementary, one can't exist without the other, they always have to go hand-in-hand with awareness intended as the ability understanding the self and controlling emotions and sensations. These two elements can't be separated due to the fact that attention is a prerequisite for awareness because one can be aware only when is able to notice and identify the contents of consciousness, which is possible only during the focused attention. The type of attention that is cultivated with the practice of Mindfulness is however particular and is characterized by being receptive and voluntarily focused without judging the mental object (perception, idea, memory, movement, desire, etc.) observed and without reacting to it, maintaining a separation and remaining able to detach it and let it go.

External events point at environmental objects and pushes which do not originate inside the human body, they are totally external. This element is crucial because it is impossible to be aware of something without having no clue about external events we can't foresee or control.

Ethical mindedness underlines the social character that is implied in the mindful practice. Moreover, it is useful because it can have a socio-political scope with the power to contribute to justice, peace and sustainability in the world.

Cultivation, from a Western point of view, is associated to the development of one's own personality through the practice of mindfulness whereas in a Buddhist sense, it aims to the cultivation of meditation itself.

Present centeredness refers to living the present moment, the here and now and has connections with the experiential dimension that mindfulness entails (Nilsson, H., & Kazemi, A. 2016). Of all the 33 definitions collected in the work of Hakan Nilsson and Ali Kazemi



from the Swedish University of Skovde, the ones provided by Scott Bishop and Zindel V. Segal, both Ph.D. at the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health and the Department of Psychiatry at University of Toronto, are amongst the most prominent. The first defines mindfulness as “a process of adjusting attention in order to bring a non-processing awareness to current experience, and a quality of relating to one's experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness and acceptance” (Scott Bishop, 2004) whereas the latter identifies it as “a practice in which the focus of a person's attention is open to admitting everything that enters the experience, while at the same time, a position of gentle curiosity allows the person to investigate whatever appears, without falling prey to automatic judgment or reaction” (Z. Segal, 2002).

#### **4. On the differences between meditation and mindfulness**

Nowadays, we live in a quite globalized world in which concepts and ideas travel time and space to reach different countries and influence their respective culture and traditions. In recent times, in fact we witnessed the transition of Eastern philosophy beginning to be adopted in the Western part of the world; many people make use or abuse of terms such as “oriental” or “orientalism” to refer to those phenomena originating from the Asian continent. Amongst these, mindfulness and meditation are tossed around quite a bit these days, mentioned in studies tackling their health benefits, or in yoga studios as new ways for people to find inner peace in today's frenetic and stressful life. But, although the two words are interrelated with one another, often used interchangeably, and sometimes, refer to the similar and general idea of keeping one's frenzied mind under control, they mean different things (Schultz J., 2020; Eisler M., 2019; Bushak L., 2016; Strocknetter K., 2018; Harvey-Jenner C., 2020). Mindfulness and meditation in fact can sometimes overlap because of the similarities they embody and also, the fact they are often used in a similar context can be a bit confusing. To distinguish the two terms, we can think of mindfulness as the result of meditation. Mindfulness is the simple act of paying attention, noticing and being present in whatever is happening now, when you are actively mindful, you avoid overthinking things, you're free from judgements, you are simply living the moment. Mindfulness can be practiced anytime, anywhere and with anyone by being fully engaged in the here and now. When you are mindful, you feel completely involved in what you're doing with all of your senses, concentrating on the task or the objective you're pursuing instead of letting your mind to wander. Moreover, Mindfulness can be both formal and informal. While meditation is usually

practiced formally and for a limited amount of time, usually from a minute to an hour, mindfulness, on the other hand, can apply to any situation throughout the day.

Meditation shares with mindfulness an ancient and spiritual history, that finds its origins in religion. It is an intentional activity, a sitting practice through which you are capable of increasing calmness, awareness and concentration. There are different types of meditation and these include: spiritual meditation, mantra meditation, transcendental meditation, mindfulness meditation, progressive relaxation, visualization meditation, focused meditation, loving-kindness meditation and movement meditation, each one involving different senses and entailing specific characteristics and practices that lead the meditator to different directions of self-development (Schultz J., 2020; Eisler M., 2019; Bushak L., 2016; Strocknetter K., 2018; Harvey-Jenner C., 2020). According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD who has been studying mindfulness for more than 35 years, says practicing mindfulness is actually a form of meditation in which the latter is the traditional seated practice that begins with deep breathing in a comfortable position bringing all your awareness to your breath and consciously guiding the mind toward a single point of focus, whereas mindfulness is a state of the mind (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994). In other words, mindfulness is the overarching concept, while meditation is an exercise to help you achieve it.

Therefore, mindfulness and meditation complement each other coming to be two sides of the same coin where meditation is a means towards a bigger end, thus mindfulness. But, let's now dive deep into the actual differences existing between mindfulness and meditation. First of all, according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, mindfulness is "*the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally*" (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994). Alternatively, Walsh and Shapiro define Meditation as a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration (Walsh and Shapiro, 2006). Based on these two definitions, we can state that meditation is the practice through which one can develop different qualities, including mindfulness (Schultz J., 2020). Furthermore, meditation is the path to mindful living, those who practice meditation in fact, appear to be more focused in their daily experiences.

Another big difference between the two has roots in the fact that mindfulness exists also without meditation because it is a quality linked to many positive attributes and many mental

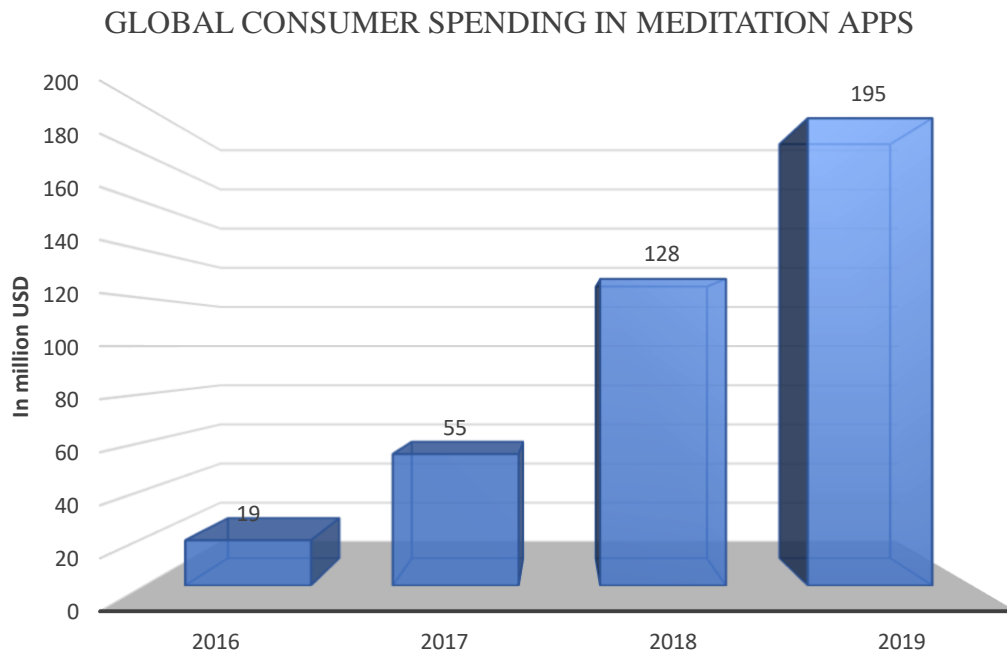
health benefits such as self-esteem which is the belief and confidence in one's own ability and value and self-acceptance or the state of accepting oneself.

A great role in managing the self is played by concentration, a tool helping the meditator to fully focus to achieve the best results. Concentration together with mindfulness are two important components of meditation practices as without concentration, it is quite impossible to grow mindfulness because it is tough to train a wandering mind to do much of anything. Concentration development is vital for the cultivation of mindfulness that cannot be forced since the latter is a gentle quality resulting from the continuous process of reclaiming a wandering mind. Concentration can be useful for noticing when the mind has wandered, but when the mind has been reclaimed, mindfulness is essential for learning from the process. Mindfulness is an attitude of open kindness, which allows someone to look at their failings and mistakes with kindness. Concentration is neither kind nor unkind; it is merely the ability for the mind to stay with the activity in which it is engaged. That's why it is important to prioritize concentration before mindfulness. Concentration can be developed, and over time the process of meditation can become much less effortful, with the reclaiming process happening with less frequency and effort (Schultz J., 2020; Eisler M., 2019; Bushak L., 2016; Strocnetter K., 2018; Harvey-Jenner C., 2020).

## **5. Meditation market: the rise of meditation apps**

I chose mindfulness and in particular mindfulness in the workplace as the object of my dissertation to analyze a constantly growing innovative approach used by companies and individuals in order to cope with daily work-related stress.

As the number of people interested in meditation grows, so do meditation apps. The idea that users can experience calm and peace from the comforts of their own homes is fueling the demand for meditation apps. As a result, mental health apps are becoming an indispensable tool for people dealing with the stresses of daily life. Meditation apps are doing well as people are more and more obsessed with self-care and mental wellbeing. The statistics below demonstrate the booming meditation app market.

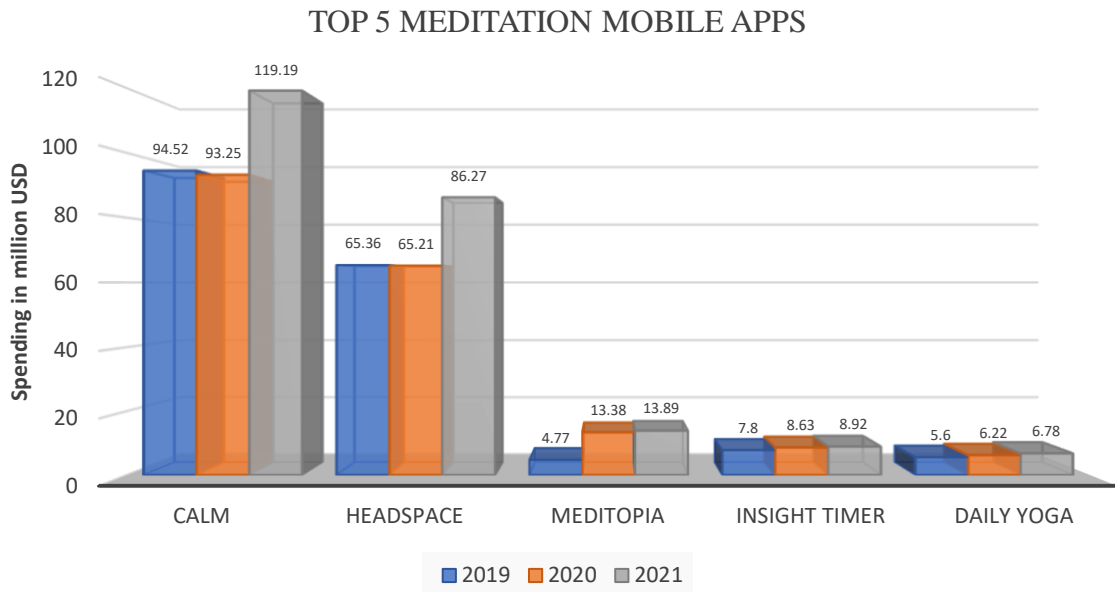


App Inventiv (2019) (Zuckerman A., 2020)

Moreover, the considerations available on the booming meditation market are not just theoretical but they come along with strong evidence that this worldwide phenomenon is worth investing in, also, future projections suggest that mindfulness knows no setback and is expected to grow even more in the years to come. To support what just stated, here are some statistics:

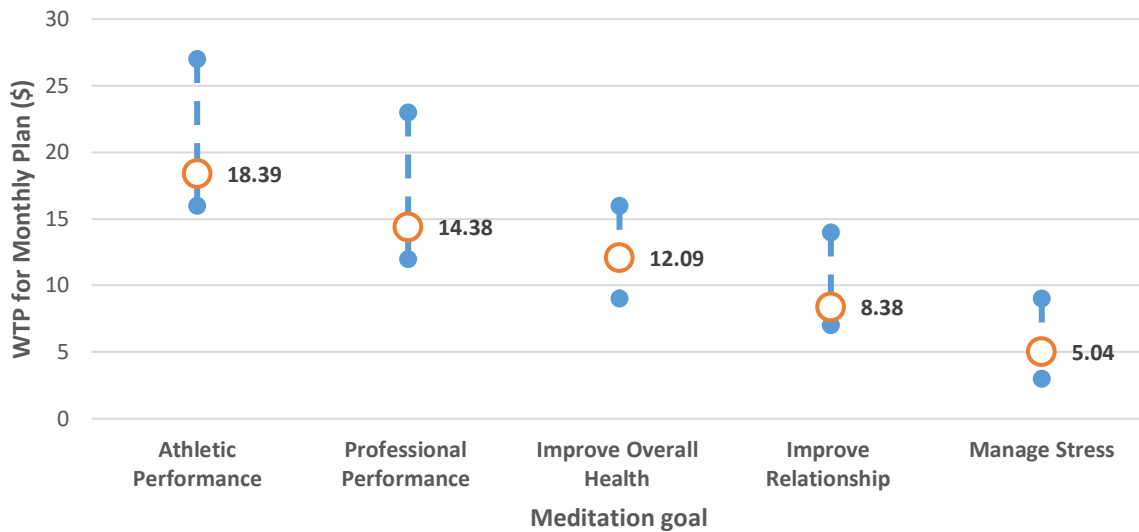
- The meditation market has grown to the point that, according to Google, people searching for meditation apps and mindfulness apps increased by 65% between 2019 and 2020 (YPulse, 2020).
- For different purposes 52 million users downloaded top 10 meditation apps in 2019 (Perez S., 2020).
- Following the increasing demand for mindfulness apps, more than 2500 of them have been launched since 2015 (Goodwin, J., 2020).
- Revenue in the meditation apps segment is forecasted to perform an annual growth rate of 13,35%, resulting in a projected market volume of \$ 6717,18 million by 2026, with the average revenue per user (ARPU) predicted to reach \$ 21,07 (Statista, 2022; Singh, P., 2022).
- A revenue of around \$ 195 million was generated by the top 10 meditation mobile apps: the two most popular and used applications showed remarkable success, Calm generated a revenue of around \$ 119,19 million for its premium characteristics and

functions, while Headspace registered \$ 86 million in consumer spending in 2021 (Singh, P., 2022).



On the topic, an analysis conducted by App Inventiv, a worldwide mobile app development company, provided some data on the US meditation market which is expected to be valued at 2,08 billion USD by the year 2022 (LaRosa J., 2019) since American users seem to spend a lot on meditation applications and because according to Statista meditation apps account for 34% of the most purchased kinds of healthcare apps in the US (Singh, P., 2022). North America is now the leading market for meditation apps showing a forecasted compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.4% between 2022 and 2032 (Fact.MR, 2022). Coming to multinational technology companies like Apple, Samsung, Huawei, Microsoft, and others, even though the battle Android VS iOS was prevalent also in the world of meditation mindfulness, nevertheless iOS is the leader in the selfcare meditation app market. Android though is registering higher revenues and more downloads; in fact, it is estimated that android meditation apps will generate \$ 74 million by 2029 (Singh, P., 2022).

### MONTHLY WILLINGNESS TO PAY BASED ON MEDITATION GOAL



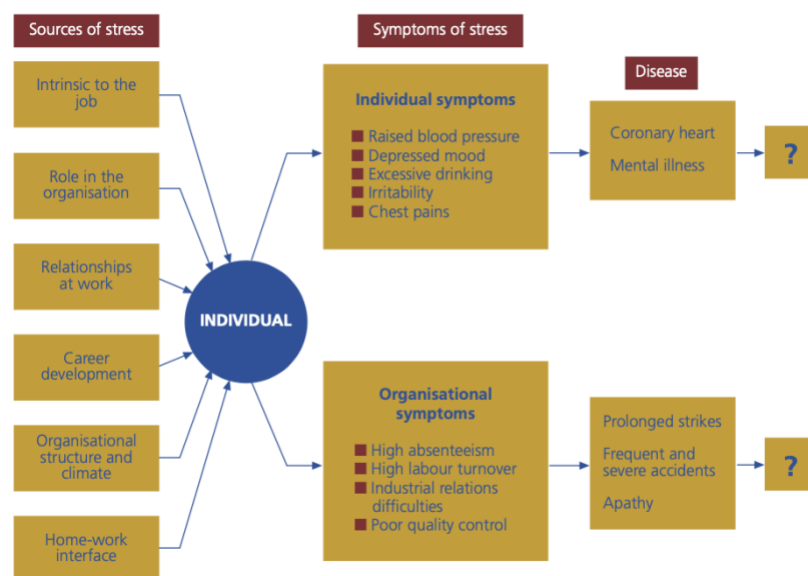
From the graph we can see that the monthly willingness of users to subscribe to mindfulness apps in order to manage stress is accounting for just \$ 5,04, amount which is the lowest if compared to the other meditation goals people are willing to invest in. Therefore, even if stress at work is now on the rise, the primary objective users paying for mindfulness apps want to achieve is not stress reduction. A much higher amount of USD equal to 14,38 though, is represented by the willingness of users to pay for meditation apps in order to improve performance at work which eventually will result in higher productivity. Yet, the meditation apps people are willing to pay the highest price for are those through which it is possible to enhance one's athletic performances and this is quite at odds with the increasing trends on work-related stress (Singh, P., 2022). Last but not least, three are the main reasons why people meditate: individuals who decide to practice meditation in order to reduce stress and anxiety account for 84% of the total meditation practitioners, 53% of them are moved by the desire to improve concentration and memory, while another 52% aims to improve performance at work or at school by practicing meditation (Mellowed, 2020).

## **Chapter 2 – Work-related stress and mindfulness**

### **1. Work-related stress: origins and definitions**

Hans Selye, a famous pioneering Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist, was the first to introduce the concept of stress in the 1930s by defining it as a non-specific response of the organism to any pressure or demand (Hans Selye, 1956). Despite his scientific work on the hypothetical non-specific reaction of an organism to external factors or “stressors”, the interpretation of the term can be plural, in fact, according to some literature, stress refers to the individual’s response to the adverse impact of their environment, while other influential people define “stress” as something related to stimuli, also known as “stressors”, that activate adaptive responses of the organism. The same term is also used by some scholars such as the American psychologist Richard Lazarus, according to whom stress is “a particular relationship between a person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resource and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus, 1984), to describe the relationship between an entity and its environment. Thus, in any case, all the interpretations which have been provided here contend that stress is a response to external events and forces; they also seem to agree on the potential harm this psychological condition can cause. By shifting to the working sphere of analysis, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work provided the following definition: “work-related stress is experienced when the demands of the work environment exceed the workers’ ability to cope with them” (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2000). Supporting evidence coming from the research report "Work-related Stress" published in 2000 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a large regulatory agency of the United States Department of Labor (henceforth OSHA) distinguishes three main approaches to the definition and study of "work-related stress": the "technical" (Cox, 1978), "physiological" (Selye, 1950) and "psychological" approaches. The "technical" approach conceives occupational stress as a characteristic peculiar to the work environment, measurable, therefore, based on strictly objective parameters. According to the British neurologist and Royal Air Force’s Senior medical officer Sir Charles Putnam Symonds, “stress is what happens to man, not what happens in man; it is a set of causes, not a set of symptoms.” (Symonds C.P.,1947), hence he identifies stress as an exogenous factor. To the contrary, the "physiological" approach defines occupational stress as the individual human activity of adapting to adverse and harmful changes in the external and internal environment, articulated in the three phases of alertness, resistance, and exhaustion.

While the doctrine considers both the systems of analysis described above as outdated, being based on a relatively simplified "stimulus-reaction" paradigm, which ignores both the differentiated impact of risk factors and the underlying perceptual processes and the related psycho-social and organizational profiles, wide acceptance currently receives, on the other hand, the "psychological" approach which defines occupational stress as a psychological state that is part of a broader process of dynamic interaction between the worker and the work environment, he or she is in. In this regard, particularly useful in understanding the enunciation of this process is the model constructed by Cooper (Cooper, Marshall 1976) which describes the potential sources of stress in the workplace (e.g., mode of job performance, role in the organization, personal interrelationships at work, professional development, organizational structure of the company, interference between private and work life), stress symptoms, distinguished into individual (high blood pressure, depression, alcoholism, irritability etc. ) and collective or organizational (high absenteeism, high labor turnover, difficult industrial relations, poor quality control), and the long-term pathologies that may arise from these symptoms (coronary heart disease, mental illness; prolonged strikes, severe and frequent injuries, apathy) (Cooper, Marshall 1976).

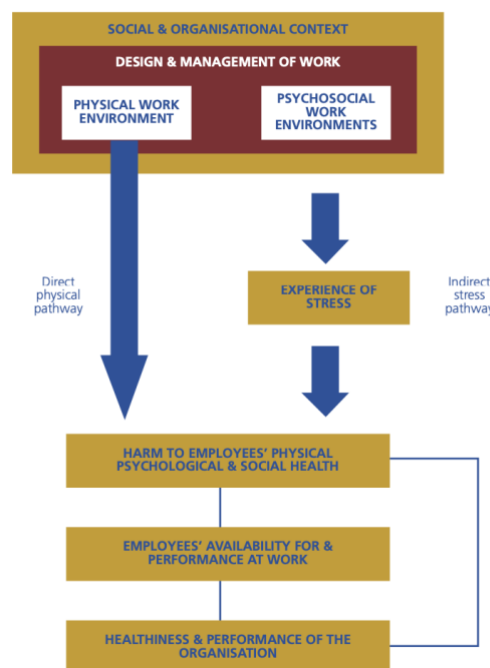


Cooper's Model of the dynamics of work stress (adapted from Cooper & Marshall, 1976) (Osha 2000, p. 44).

In the end, a more precise and effective definition of work-related stress is reached, if we combine Cooper's descriptive system with a further perspective of analysis, focusing, this time, on the relationship between risk factors and health damage. In this sense, it should be appropriate to point out that occupational hazards can be classified into two categories:



physical hazards, distinguished into biological, biomedical, chemical, and radioactive, and "psycho-social" hazards, understood as "those aspects of work design, organization and management, and their social and environmental contexts, that have the potential to cause psychological, social and physical harm" (Cox & Griffiths, 1995). Both these categories of risk can affect the health of the worker physically and psychologically. Empirical research, however, mentions that while physical risks to cause harm, follow a direct physical process, psychosocial risks, on the other hand, require an answer to work-related stress. The latter can thus be explained through Cox's "Dual Pathway hazard-harm" Model in which work-related stress comes to be defined as the experience that converts the potential impact of a psychosocial risk into actual damage to the worker's health, no matter if physical or psychological.



Cox's "Dual Pathway hazard-harm" Model (p. 62)

Most of the existing literature on the hazard-stress-health relationship focuses on psychosocial hazards, but it misses physical work risks (Levi, 1984). Instead, it should be quite relevant to consider the latter given the fact that the psychological effects of physical hazards mirror both their direct action on the brain and the worker's awareness, or impression that they are being exposed to harm. Harm, as well as risk aversion is what might give rise to the experience of stress in the first place. For instance, exposure to toxic substances may cause a psychological effect on the worker through their direct effects on the brain, the unpleasantness of their smell and through the worker's fear that such exposure might be damaging (Levi, 1981; Kasl, 1992). Such fears may affect task performance, workers' psychological stability and health.

According to the Second European Survey on Working Conditions in the European Union conducted in 1996, the prevalence of stressful physical environments has been reported to be on the rise across EU countries between 1991 and 1996 (European Foundation, 1996) and this might produce negative outcomes given the high degree to which physical and psychological hazards are interrelated and the way they influence each other.

## **2. Causes of work-related stress**

Ineffective work organization or how managers design jobs and work systems, and the way these are managed can cause work stress. Similarly, these factors can have an impact on workers who might not receive adequate support from other colleagues or might lack sufficient power to control their job and its burdens (Cooper, CL, Liukkonen, P. & Cartwright, S., 1996). Therefore, poor work design, poor management, and unsatisfactory working conditions coupled with low decision-making can all result in excessive and furthermore difficult to be handled demands and pressures. According to some research, the most stressful types of work are those that prioritize excessive demands and pressures that do not match with workers' knowledge and abilities, where there is little opportunity for choice or control, and where little support comes from others (Cox, T., & Cox, S., 1993). The more employees are offered the conditions and placed in an environment that encourages and pushes them to express their knowledge and skills, the less likely it is for them to feel stressed (Cox, T., Griffiths, A.J, Barlow, C., Randall, R. Thomson, T. & Rial González, E., 2000). The same rules apply to interpersonal relationships, as the more workers support each other, the less likely they are to be exposed to stress. Once again, employees are less likely to become victims of work-related stress if they have control over their job tasks and how they perform them, and if they are granted permission to participate in decisions affecting their jobs (Cox, T., Griffiths A., & Rial Gonzalez, E., 2000). Causes of work stress are mostly related to how work is designed and how organizations are managed (ILO, 1986). These aspects of work are known as stress-related hazards because they have the potential to cause harm and the literature on stress acknowledges nine types (ILO, 1992). Therefore, occupational stress is to be analyzed first, based on the stress linked to exposure to the physical hazards of work and second, based on the stress caused by exposure to psychosocial hazards. Most of the physical hazards are measurable to such an extent that they are relatively easy to be monitored in the workplace. One of the most studied in this category which particular attention has been paid to is noise as a source of stress and threat to health (Holt, 1982). Noise can act as a physical

and psychological “stressor” (Akerstedt & Landstrom, 1998; Kryter, 1972; Kasl, 1992). The Scottish economist and philosopher who was a pioneer of political economy Adam Smith suggests that “the (non-auditory) health effects of noise may often reflect psychological reactions to the noise – stress – as well as objective exposure levels” (Smith, A. 1991). High levels of noise directly damage the middle and inner ears with consequent impairment of hearing (Jones, 1983). Less severe noise may interfere with speech perception and communication (Jones, 1999) and, particularly if it lasts in time, may lead an individual to experience stress, anxiety, tension, increase fatigue and impair performance efficiency (Cohen, 1969, 1974; Barreto et al., 1997; Glass & Singer, 1972; Miller, 1974; Cohen, 1980; Ahasan et al., 1999). However, evidence of the relationship between noise and psychological and physical health (beyond damage to the ear and hearing impairment) is, according to Jones (1983), equivocal: while health effects have been found in several studies, they cannot be unequivocally linked to exposure to high levels of noise. He argues that in most studies the effects of noise are confounded with those of other hazards: noisy work is often hazardous in other respects. While such arguments are valid, they do need to be placed in perspective given the complexity of all work design and the availability of other data (Landstrom et al., 1995). Smith has concluded that there is considerable evidence that acute noise exposure produces physiological responses which, if prolonged, could have harmful effects on health. He has also argued that the available epidemiological data suggest that noise is a risk factor for health (Smith, A. 1991). Furthermore, intervention and epidemiological studies suggest that noise can have harmful effects on health (Cohen, 1976; Wallhagen et al., 1997). Related to other physical factors, evidence shows that overall poor physical working conditions can affect both workers’ experience of stress and their physical and psychological health (Warr, 1992). However, the studies that directly establish the hazard-stress-harm pathway are not many. Some studies, like the one conducted by Althouse & Hurrell in 1977 for example, which compared 486 coal miners in the US to 452 workers in jobs of similar status, suggest that the effects of physical hazards on stress and health are not related (Althouse & Hurrell, 1977). Althouse & Hurrell, in fact, discovered that despite a difference in the levels of physical dangerousness the two types of work imply, no differences were registered in the experience of stress. In the case of some hazards, such as temperature and humidity (Biersner et al., 1971), what is associated with the experience of stress and has effects on health is the extremes of physical work conditions: workers are often able to adapt to mid-range conditions without effort or attention (Holt, 1982; Szabo et al., 1983). In the case of others, it is more

simply the presence of the hazard or even the perceived threat of its presence which is associated with the experience of stress.

Related to the psychosocial hazards, the psychological aspects of work have been the subject of research since the 1950s (Johnson, 1996; Sauter et al., 1998). At first, psychologists mostly focused on the obstacles to employees' adaptation to the work environment, rather than on the potentially harmful characteristics the workplace itself might entail for workers (Gardell, 1982). However, following the emergence of psychosocial work environment research and that of occupational psychology in the 1960s (Johnson & Hall, 1996) attention was redirected towards considering the impact of certain aspects of the work environment on health. As a matter of fact, it became important to underline that work can be stressful when it is perceived as involving work demands which do not match with the competences of workers (in terms of skills and knowledge) or their needs, especially when those workers have little control over work and receive little support at work. Consequently, "Psychosocial hazards" can be defined as "those aspects of work design and the organization and management of work, and their social and environmental contexts, which have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm" (Cox & Griffiths, 1995) and may have an impact on both psychological and physical health directly or indirectly through the experience of stress. In particular, it was after the birth of occupational psychology that a large body of evidence (Cox, 1993; Landy et al., 1994; Kasl, 1987 & 1990) identifying a common set of work characteristics as potentially stressful was issued. Four headings have been created by Levi (1984) to group the various psychosocial characteristics of work: quantitative overload, qualitative underload, lack of control over work and lack of social support. Every element of these working circumstances represents a possible source of stress as it carries the potential for harm. These are the core elements of psychosocial risks since they determine how unpleasant and stressful a situation at work is perceived by the individual. Depending on the type of employment and work environment, they may, however, find "surface" expression and combine in different ways for different threats. A reasonable consensus exists among the various efforts to review the literature on those psychosocial risks of work which are experienced as stressful to encounter or otherwise have other possible negative effects (Baker, 1985; Blohmke & Reimer, 1980; Cooper & Marshall, 1976; Cox, 1978, 1985b; Cox & Cox, 1993; Frankenhauser & Gardell, 1976; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Kasl, 1992; Levi, 1972, 1984; Levi et al., 1986; Loher et al., 1985; Marmot & Madge, 1987; National Institute, 1988; Sauter et al., 1992; Sharit & Salvendy, 1982; Szabo et al., 1983; Warr, 1987, 1992). This consensus lists ten categories of job features, work environments and organizations that may be hazardous. According to

certain sources (Hacker, 1991; Hacker et al., 1983), these aspects of work can be used to describe the context of work or its content. Each of these ten components of work has proven stressful and damaging to health under specific circumstances, which are also described in.

Category	Conditions defining hazard
<i>Context to work</i>	
Organizational culture and function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development, lack of definition of organizational objectives
Role in organization	Role ambiguity and role conflict, responsibility for people
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, underpromotion or overpromotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work
Decision latitude/control	Low participation in decision making, lack of control over work
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support
Home-work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, dual career problems
<i>Content of work</i>	
Work environment and work equipment	Problems regarding the reliability, availability, suitability and maintenance or repair of both equipment and facilities
Task design	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, underuse of skills, high uncertainty
Workload/workpace	Work overload or underload, lack of control over pacing, high levels of time pressure
Work schedule	Shift working, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsocial hours

Psychosocial hazards are elements in work design or management that raise the chances of increased work-related stress and can provoke psychological or physical harm. Lack of supervisor support or high job demands are two examples of the many psychosocial hazards employees are likely to face with some being present at work all the time, while others occurring only on occasion. When psychosocial hazards combine and act together, the risk of work-related stress increases, so employers and leaders should not consider hazards as isolated factors. Psychosocial hazards do not always reveal the underlying causes of work-related stress which are instead most likely unique to the employee, work, or workplace. Some of the psychological injuries that may originate from the exposure to psychosocial

hazards are conditions of emotional distress, depression, traumas, burnout and anxiety; also, prolonged exposure to psychosocial risks can influence performance at work and lead to increased absenteeism and staff turnover, increased conflicts, decreases in productivity, creativity and efficiency and a decline in job satisfaction, motivation and team unity (WorkSafe Victoria., 2022). The psychological dangers that are associated with the "context to work" and have the potential to cause harm are discussed in the section that follows.

- **Organizational culture and function**

Working for an organization, as do most workers in Europe (Cox et al., 1990), can be seen as a threat to one's personal independence, autonomy, and sense of identity (Hingley & Cooper, 1986). According to research on employees' impressions and descriptions of their workplaces, these focus on three key characteristics of organizational function and culture: the workplace as a task environment, the workplace as a place to solve problems, and the workplace as a place for development (Cox & Howarth, 1990; Cox & Leiter, 1992). The research implies that higher levels of stress are likely to be associated with an organization's perception of being poor in these environments. To the contrary, the association between experiencing stress and reporting occupational illnesses is weakened if the organization is perceived to be successful in these areas (Cox & Kuk, 1991). The following organizational characteristics are described by Kasl (1992) as potentially risky: organizational size and structure (flat structure with few levels), laborious and ad hoc procedures, and role-related concerns. The latter are going to be discussed further on. A large portion of how organization, function, and culture affect employees will be communicated through the actions of managers and supervisors; as proof suggests, supervisory and managerial practices have a significant effect on employees' emotional health (Landy, 1992; Corey & Wolf, 1992). The way they handled the work context and content concerns outlined in may have had some of an impact and, according to this logic, any effect of style could be largely a reflection of broader issues in interpersonal relationships.

- **Role in Organization**

The evidence that "role in organization" constitutes a potential psychological hazard is mostly related to issues of role ambiguity and role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964; Kahn, 1973; Ingersoll et al., 1999; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Role overload, role inadequacy, and responsibility for others have all been identified as additional potentially dangerous elements of roles. Such characteristics are among the most effective predictors of psychological wellness, according to French et al. (1982). In a study of white-collar professionals, Bhalla et al. employed measures of all the five aspects of role mentioned above (1991). They have to do with the

stress, job happiness, and organizational commitment that employees reported. Role ambiguity takes place when a worker has no adequate information about his or her job position and work responsibilities. It is likely to be related to new situations and change (Ivancevich & Mattenson, 1980) showing up as a general lack of clarity regarding expectations, ineffective objectives, and a general lack of understanding of the duties and obligations of the position. According to Kahn et al. (1964), employees who experienced role ambiguity reported poorer levels of job satisfaction, more instances of work-related stress, and lower self-confidence. Later studies by Margolis et al. (1974) discovered several important connections between role ambiguity and depressive symptoms, low job motivation, and intention to quit the job. Although the correlations observed in all these investigations were significant and together painted a consistent picture, Cooper and Marshall (1976) pointed out that they were not very strong (only accounting for about 2-5 percent of the data variance). Role conflict occurs when an individual is asked to play a role which is at odds with his or her values or when the many roles played by the individual are incongruent with one another. A study conducted by the American psychologist and social scientist, considered the “founding father” of the contemporary approach to organizational theory and survey research Robert L. Kahn, suggests that the greater the role conflict, thus the more a company’s values fail to mirror those of the individual who has to embrace them, the lower job satisfaction and the greater job-related tension men are going to experience (Kahn et. al., 1964). Cooper & Smith (1986) also added that white-collars are more inclined to role conflict than manual workers or “blue-collars” as this last category of workers is often involved in repetitive and monotonous activities whereas the first is responsible of tasks that entail broader sets of values. Role insufficiency represents the organization’s failure to exploit individuals’ abilities and training at full (O’Brien, 1982). Such insufficiency has been reported to lead to demotivation and feelings of stress with workers who feel not in the position to express their capabilities and know-how because they have not been put in a favorable condition for them to flourish and prosper, thus causing psychological strain, low organizational commitment, and low job satisfaction. Along with role issues, responsibility for people has been identified as a potential cause of stress. Responsibility for people translates into a greater level of overall responsibility and as it is demonstrated by French & Caplan (1970), it is significantly related to vices such as heavy smoking, high serum cholesterol parameters and raised diastolic blood pressure which of course are of damage to the human body and health.

- **Career Development**

The anxiety and willingness to achieve self-realization and to pursue a brilliant career may also constitute a source of stress, particularly in organizations in which the relationship between career development and worth or competence is at the center. Two major groups of potential causes of stress have been identified by Lancaster University Professor Judi Marshall (1977): the first corresponds to lack of job security, poor pay, and obsolescence; the second instead refers to status incongruity with the former probably interacting with the latter. According to Sir Cary Cooper (1978), an American-born British psychologist and Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at the Manchester Business School, most people will experience some loss of status before they retire, and those who believe they have reached the peak of their careers are likely to be most afraid of obsolescence and failure that would lead to demotion. On this matter, Roberston & Cooper (1983) added that if employees are unable to adjust their expectations to the reality of their circumstances, these anxieties may lead to stress. It should come as no surprise that elder workers are more vulnerable because of their tendency to highly value stability (Sleeper, 1975).

- **Decision latitude and control**

Decision latitude and control reflect the degree to which workers are allowed to participate in the decision-making processes affecting their job. Low control or loss of control also referred to as low decision latitude, has ties with the feelings of anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and exhaustion (Terry & Jimmieson, 1999; Ganster & Fusilier, 1989; Sauter et al., 1989; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Evidence suggests that an increase in workers' control is universally beneficial: companies could get more insights about job design and management from many different points of view and this would for sure enrich its vision and enlarge its mission, on the other hand employees could feel recognized by the company as important for the job position they occupy and could see their commitment rewarded, thus leading to a general improvement in job satisfaction and motivation. Consequently, according to Cox (1990) and Warr (1992), workers should be given the power to plan their work, make decisions on the tasks to be performed, control their workloads, and decide on how problems should be tackled. Not everyone though agrees on employees' empowerment, Neufeld & Paterson (1989), for instance, argue that greater control can also be a double-edged sword as stress can be caused by the demands implied by the decisions made in managing settings. As research supports, greater participation in the decision-making results in higher self-esteem, concrete feeling of being part of the firm one's working for and greater satisfaction (French & Caplan, 1970,



1972; Buck, 1972; Margolis et al. 1974; Spector, 1986) whereas on the other side, non-participation or low participation seems to be related to stress (Margolis & Kroes, 1974).

- **Interpersonal relationships at work**

As Cary Cooper stresses, good relationships amongst workers and members of work groups are beneficial for both individual and organizational health (Cooper, 1981). Based on a survey conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Labor in 1987, unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships at work were the leading cause of anxiety and stress for 52% of the women surveyed which accounted for the 61% of the total. In a similar vein, Jones et al. (1998) discovered that employees who reported high levels of stress and stress-related illnesses were around 6 times more likely than the general working population to report “lack of support from individuals in authority at work.” Given the relevance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, it should be noted that these can be of different kinds: relationships with colleagues, subordinates, or the relationship with superiors (Sauter et al., 1992). Symptoms like exhaustion, high anxiety, job tension and low satisfaction have come to be associated with and are often caused by low interpersonal support at work (Davidson & Cooper, 1981). Additionally, a large body of evidence shows that on, and off-work social relationships play a moderating role since they can help manage psychosocial hazards (Cobb & Kasl, 1977; Cohen & Willis, 1985; House & Wells, 1978). According to Lobban et al. (1998), supervisory styles, in terms of giving instructions and dealing with staff members, may be more important to the stress process than it is currently recognized. Additionally, they contend that supervisory relationships, whether they be direct or indirect effects of other job characteristics, have a considerable additional impact on occupational stress that is not accounted for by role or demand/latitude variables. Despite the clear correlation existing between the number of hours worked and stress levels, Fielden & Peckar (1999) discovered that the number of hours worked was positively associated to the perception of social support. Buck (1972) affirms that employees' perceptions of job pressure appear to be inversely related to their bosses' “considerate” behavior. When employees are involved in decision-making processes, they report higher levels of job satisfaction and better feelings of self-worth and self-accomplishment (Buck, 1972; French & Caplan, 1970, 1972; Margolis et al., 1974). Donaldson & Gowler (1975) believe that forcing managers to “manage by participation” puts them under more pressure and may engender anger and anxiety in the managers. Competition in the workplace, particularly among managers, may raise stress levels by inhibiting problem sharing and lowering collaboration, according to Robertson & Cooper (1983).

- **Home-Work Interface**

Contrarily to what we might think when hearing the expression “home-work interface”, this concept does not refer solely to private and domestic life, but also more in general, to life outside work. Concerning the work and family spheres, Hingley & Cooper (1986) have stated that conflicts between work and family either revolve around problems of demands on time and commitment or relate to lack of support. When a family has young children, it might become more challenging to resolve conflicts between work and family; this may be especially true for female employees (Larwood & Wood, 1979; Bhagat & Chassie, 1981) who have to manage their being women, workers and mothers all at once. Early studies revealed that most middle-class wives appear to view their position as being mostly “supporting and domestic” regarding their husbands' job (Pahl & Pahl, 1971). Although opinions looked to be shifting, Cooper & Hingley (1985) discovered a similar tendency in the wives of their sample of executive males in the United Kingdom. Failure to appropriately reconcile the demands of job and family may undermine the assistance that spouses, and the family, can provide. Some groups of employees may waste potentially productive free time due to spillover effects from their jobs (Gardell, 1973; Cox, 1980). The latter situation is encapsulated in the concept of “wasted leisure time syndrome” which, according to Professor Gardell (1973), indicates those workers who are not able to enjoy their spare time outside work and the only activities they are capable of focusing on are those regarding the household.

- **Change**

Change is frequently categorized as a psychosocial risk, however it is difficult to understand whether change is stressful or dangerous per se, or if its potentially stressful nature results from the uncertainty and loss of control that it often entails.

The following section describes those psychosocial risks connected to “the content of work” which are perceived as stressful and may be eventually harmful.

- **Task design**

Many different aspects of the job content can be considered hazardous and amongst the others, internationally recognized psychosocial epidemiologist Stanislav V. Kasl, identifies low use of skills, uncertainty, lack of learning, low value, no task variety, no job rotation and repetitiveness in work, high expectation demands, conflicting demands and lack of resources (Kasl, 1992). The two aspects we are going to pay attention to the most are semi-skilled together with unskilled work and uncertainty. With regard to the first, thus implying those jobs that require no advanced education or a highly specialized set of skills but request employees to develop certain capabilities through training programs beforehand, workers that

are exposed to monotonous and repetitive jobs often report feelings of boredom, which in the end tends to result in conditions of anxiety, depression and more in general poor psychological health (Kornhauser, 1965; Gardell, 1971; Laville & Teiger, 1976; Caplan et al., 1975; Broadbent & Gath, 1981; O'Hanlon, 1981; Smith, 1981). As for uncertainty, lack of performance feedback and other forms of work uncertainty can be stressful, especially if they last for a long period of time (Warr, 1992). The consequences of other risky job features, such as confusion about appropriate behaviors (role ambiguity) and worry about the future, may be partially explained by such uncertainty, which can be represented through a lack of performance feedback, but also through job insecurity and redundancy.

- **Workload and work pace**

Based on some research conducted by American industrial psychologist Arthur William Kornhauser, "poor mental health was directly related to unpleasant working conditions, the necessity to work fast and to expend a lot of physical effort and to excessive and inconvenient hours" (Kornhauser, 1965). The issue of workload was one of the first to be studied and if it is unarguable that work overload can be problematic, it should be noted that also work underload can cause troubles as it leaves employees with an incongruence between their contractual working hours and the tasks they need to perform which can be completed in a shorter period of time compared to that indicated in the contract (Frankenhauser, 1975; Frankenhauser & Gardell, 1975; Lundberg & Forsman, 1979; Szabo et al., 1983; Jones et al., 1998). Furthermore, a plain distinction was made between qualitative and quantitative workloads (French & Caplan, 1970; French et al., 1974), yet both associated to the experience of stress. Quantitative workload is the quantity of work that needs to be completed, whereas qualitative workload is the level of complexity that specific job entails. Since the two workload dimensions are independent, one does not exclude the other, therefore it is possible to have work that is both quantitatively and qualitatively overloaded. This type of short-cycle repetitive assembly work is common, and there is ample evidence that it poses a risk to workers' physical and mental well-being. This line of reasoning has been expanded upon by Kahn & Byosiere (1990), who contend that workload is a function of quality, quantity, and time. According to Jones et al. (1998), employees reporting high levels of stress and stress-related illnesses were almost 5 times more likely than the general working population to indicate issues with "working to deadlines" and "having too much work." Managers frequently extend their workdays to deal with job overload, thus trying to spread the tasks they have to perform on a greater number of days (Uris, 1972), and while this may provide a temporary fix for the issue at hand, prolonged workdays could pose their own problems. For

this reason, in the last couple of years, firms around Europe in particular, are experimenting the shorter workweek, which consists in reducing workdays from 5 to 4 while maintaining the same pay level, but with an equal workload.

Workload comes together with work pace which is intended as the speed at which work must be done and the nature and control of the pacing requirement which might be self-, systems-, or machine-paced. Control, within reason, may be the deciding element in determining health (Sauter et al., 1989). Machine- and systems-paced labor is clearly bad for physical and mental well-being, especially if it's done at a fast rate (Bradley, 1989; Cox, 1985a, 1985b; Smith et al., 1981; Smith, 1985). A variety of temporal aspects that can be quantified in organizational contexts have been identified by Schriber & Gutek (1987). Time urgency, referred to as “a fixation with the passage of time and a compulsion that every second of the day should be jammed with as much production as possible” (Robinson, J. n.d.), is typically thought of as a personal trait, but it may also be a function of the job. But most importantly, with time urgency, as employees value speed in order to produce as much as they can, productivity is killed, and people are likely to be diagnosed with heart diseases or high blood pressure. According to Johansson & Aronsson (1984), VDT workers (Visual Display Terminal) have a greater sense of time urgency at work than other occupational groups. Additionally, Gael (1988) and Landy (1989), employing task analysis, have shown that given large and homogeneous samples of industrial workers, changes in time demands of activities may be easily found.

- **Work schedule**

Two main problems are linked to the outcomes of work scheduling on health conditions: long working hours and shift work (Canadian Mental Health Association, 1984) and work often entails both these two categories (Folkard & Monk, 1985). To start with, long working hours are regulated by the European Community Directive on Working Time that should have been adopted by all the member states of the European Community by November 1996 and that embodies a number of labor law requirements such as the right of employees to refuse to work for over 48 hours per week. The issues with shift work have received a lot of attention in this field of study, emphasizing this aspect of working hours. The impacts of overtime labor, which is a key aspect of the Directive's requirements, are, however, the subject of much less research. Research has only been conducted so far on a small number of health outcomes, specifically cardiovascular and mental problems (Spurgeon et al., 1997). Other possible impacts that are typically linked to and derive from stress like gastrointestinal or musculoskeletal issues, and problems related to immune system depression for instance, seem

to have received marginal attention. Additionally, there haven't been many systematic studies of performance consequences or analyses of how lengthening the workday may affect occupational exposure limits. The data that are now available are largely related to circumstances in which work hours account for more than 50 per week, and there is a dearth of data on hours below this threshold, which is directly related to European Union legislation. According to Spurgeon et al. (1997), the level and nature of health and performance results can be influenced by the attitudes and motivation of the people involved, the job requirements, and other elements of the organizational and cultural context. They do, however, agree that there is currently enough information to warrant concern regarding the hazards that lengthy working hours pose to one's health and safety. Prolonged working hours have been linked to increased weariness, from extended 12-hour workdays (Rosa et al., 1989) to continued working over multiple days with sleep deprivation (Stampi, 1989; Patton et al., 1989; von Restorff et al., 1989). Based on the Working Conditions Report by the European Foundation of 1996, a significant fraction of employees in the EU work long hours with 49% of the total workers across EU working more than 40 hours per week, and 23% of them exceeding the 45 hours per week at work (Paoli, & Pascal, 2000). The statistics also appeared to be showing that health issues like stress and back pain grew worse with an increase in the number of hours worked. 12-hour workdays and compressed workweeks have been linked to increased fatigue (Rosa & Colligan, 1986). Rosa et al. (1989) have demonstrated that, compared to earlier studies on a 5-7 day/ 8-hour schedule, there were reductions in sleep and decreases in subjective alertness following seven months of transition to a 3- 4 day/12-hour rotating shift schedule. Self-reported stress also increased, but its effects were attenuated by the fact that the workweek was being shortened. Extended working can be a source of sleep loss and perceived job strain or burnout (Ryman et al., 1989). According to some scholars, a person can work continuously and intensively for two or three days maximum to perform at his best and boost productivity (Haslam, 1982; Naitoh et al., 1983). Junior doctors as a professional group are particularly cause for concern. For instance, Spurgeon & Harrington (1989) examined how junior hospital doctors' performance and health were affected by their long workdays. Due to specific work schedules, junior doctors in the United Kingdom were working shifts of approximately 102 hours until recently. According to Spurgeon and Harrington (1989), several research have demonstrated that a significant portion of recently graduated doctors experience psychological distress to some extent. They contend that there may be a connection between this and lack of sleep, which, at this point, is likely to expose doctors to other workplace dangers. Although the creation of a Task Force resulted in a large

decrease in the hours worked by junior doctors, Fielden & Peckar (1999) nonetheless discovered a strong correlation between the number of hours worked and stress levels. In conclusion, it should be noted that control over work schedules is crucial to the organization and design of jobs, and it might be achieved through flextime agreements (Landy, 1989). To compare the above-mentioned data with more recent ones, in 2017, according to a report issued by Great Place to Work in 2020 on work-related stress and well-being, Europeans worked 40, 47 hours per week on average and the number of hours worked in a week remained stable even in 2018. Thus, with respect to the Working Conditions Report drafted by the European Foundation in 1996, no significant changes seem to have been registered in the amount of working hours European workers are subject to except for an overall slight decrease in the last few years, with Turkey reporting the longest working hours in Europe in both 2017 and 2018 (respectively 49,1 and 48,5 per week) followed by the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Austria (Great Place to Work, 2020).

The second category which is that of shift workers is the most studied one as, according to the University of Birmingham's Professor J M Harrington, nowadays about one in five workers in Europe is employed on shift work. Shift work systems require workers to work for 6 to 12 hours at a time with shift groups alternating on two, three or four shifts in any 24-hour period. Also, one in twenty employees work extended hours in Europe today. Extended hours of work generally refer to people working for longer than 48 hours per week and this can happen on either day work or shift work due to many hours worked in a day or due to a higher number of days worked in a week (Harrington, 1978). As Harrington (1978) stated "whereas good evidence exists to show that shift work, particularly night work, causes disruption of circadian rhythms and sleep patterns, the evidence for there being any major effect on health is slim." He also brought up the link between shift work and fatigue by affirming that people working for abnormal hours are used to raise complaints on fatigue, which is particularly accentuated after night shifts. Moreover, he argued that any effect would have been greater in people struggling to adapt to shift work or in those individuals who suffered from sleep related problems already of their own.

With the world of business currently being transformed and reshaped, socio-economic and technological changes on a large scale had quite a significant impact on contemporary workplaces to the point that we can feel the digital age while at the same time we are becoming aware of the fact that we live in an era of radical transformation in the workplace in which forms of employment such as hybrid or all-remote are becoming part of work mainstream. The context and the content of work are in fact gradually changing as new

patterns of work organization and job design are being developed and spread across the world including smart working, increased use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools and again activities like outsourcing, downsizing, subsidizing together with the changes in employment trends, workers being asked for more flexibility and an increasing fraction of the population working in the tertiary sector, with the adoption of teamwork and self-regulated work to give employees more freedom of choice and more independence. There is also preliminary evidence to show that even measures implemented with the aim to improve the work environment can have the opposite effect, however the research corpus is still expanding in these areas (Rosenstock, 1997). Supporting meta-analytical research demonstrated that the adoption of teamwork or self-regulated work results in either mixed outcomes (Bettenhausen, 1991; Windel & Zimolong, 1997) or higher rates of absenteeism and employee turnover (Cohen and Ledford, 1994). It is for all the above-listed reasons that changes entailing such a remarkable impact on the way businesses operate may also relate to possible hazards that need to be kept under control for their potential effects on people's health and well-being.

### **3. Effects of work-related-stress**

Since we are surrounded and subject to relationships of cause and effect on a daily basis, it goes without saying that work-related stress is no independent problem as it creates some specific effects. In particular, the perception of stress can modify the way in which a person thinks, feels, and behaves and at the same time, the experience of stress can also alter an individual's physiological function (Stansfeld et al., 1999; Sauter & Murphy, 1995; Cincirpini et al., 1984; Stainbrook & Green, 1983). Many of these changes may be easy to revert even though they still have an impact on humans' lives which in the end turns out to be harmful to the quality of life. Some workers, however, might be profoundly affected by these changes to such an extent that increased stress might translate into poor performance at work, decrease in productivity and creativity in the workplace and last into social and psychological problems of various kinds (Devereux et al., 1999). Health and health-related effects of stress can be put under two main classes: psychological and social effects and physiological and physical ones. Stress's psychological effects can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including changes in cognitive-perceptual function, emotion, and behavior. There is evidence that stress impairs some health-promoting behaviors, such as exercise and relaxation, sleep, and good dietary habits, while it enhances other health-risk behaviors or vices, such as drinking and smoking.

Other, potentially health-neutral behaviors, like sexual behavior, can also be impaired, and this impairment can become a secondary source of stress. In a similar way, an increase in the spread and adoption of health-risk behaviors such as alcoholism, drugs, or smoking addictions for instance, may be a potential secondary cause of stress. Stress may weaken social behavior and interpersonal relationships, likely to reflect more fundamental psychological changes in irritability, attention span, and memory. Stress-related problems in social relationships can cause difficulties as well as result in the reduction of social support. It is quite interesting to note that even though the literature describing normal psychological reactions to events translating into psychological illnesses is not sophisticated enough, the latter have been associated with work stress (Stansfeld et al., 1999).

American physiologist, chairman of the Department of Physiology at Harvard Medical School Walter Bradford Cannon and Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist Hans Selye pioneered modern research into physical and physiological health correlates of stress in the 1920s and 1930s (Cannon, 1929; Cannon, 1931; Selye, 1936). Much has been written about this subject since then (Landsbergis et al., 1995; Meijman et al., 1995; Kawakami & Haratani, 1999). A large body of information on physiological responses in people exposed to external stimuli, also referred to as “stressors” has been accumulated. Adrenaline and cortisol became known as stress hormones because, according to some laboratory-based studies, levels of both hormones consistently rise in men in response to stress and, if chronic, can lead to long-term consequences for health due to the hormones’ effects on blood pressure and cholesterol levels (Pollard, 1997). Professor of Surgery, Microbiology and Immunology at the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine, Michael E. Zegans suggested that physiological changes provoked by stress are likely to manifest in three different ways: as a concurrent physiological response to a threat or failure; as a physiological reaction to a threat appraisal when managing the problem is not plausible; and as a non-specific response during the initial orientation-alarm state (Zegans, 1982). Zegans also proposed some mechanisms by which such physiological reactions could contribute to pathology by arguing that the acute response may cause damage in and of itself, especially if an already compromised organ system is involved. If that's not the situation, repeated occurrences of the insult may result in more permanent damage. The stress experience and the physiological insult it causes may become chronic, causing more permanent damage (Zegans, 1982). These three conditions cover the most frequently cited causes of increased wear and tear on the body (Selye, 1950): severe, frequent, or long-term exposure to stressors. Anyway, evidence shows that four physiological systems appear to be extremely vulnerable to stress: the cardiovascular system (Brady & Harris, 1977;



Schneiderman, 1978; Kristensen, 1996); endocrine system (Mason, 1968; Stone, 1975); gastro-intestinal function (Turkkan et al., 1982) and immune system (Monjan, 1981; Kawakami & Haratani, 1999). However, Cox advanced that all physical conditions and physiological systems with no exception, under specific and critique circumstances, are potentially prone to stress effects (Cox, 1980). In this perspective, concerns should be raised about who is more vulnerable or who is most directly vulnerable, and how that vulnerability is affected by the nature of work and the workplace. Moving from the individual level to the organizational one, it has been stated that if a high number of workers is undergoing the experience and is expressing the effects of stress when at work, the problem then takes on organizational proportions. From a theoretical point of view, organizations should be aware of some specific stress-related effects more than others, the most worthy of attention seem to be: impaired work performance and lowered employee productivity, limited availability for work which translates into higher absenteeism and turnover, poor time keeping, increase in client complaints (Jones et al., 1988) and an increase in employee compensation claims (Barth, 1990; Lippe, 1990; Neary et al., 1992). Although absenteeism is quite diffused, escapist strategies might not be a universal choice, some stressed workers in fact might opt for presenteeism, in other words, they might decide to continue to show up at work but to perform poorly which is, in some cases, worse than absenteeism as the productivity aspect of the task completion is completely taken away.

### **3.1 Burnout syndrome: chronic workplace stress**

Burnout is a psychological condition that develops as a prolonged reaction to persistent interpersonal pressures at work. The overwhelming tiredness, feelings of cynicism or mental disengagement from one's own job and alienation from the task, coupled with a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment are the three main aspects of this response. This three-dimensional model is significant because it explicitly situates a person's experience of stress within a social context and takes into account the conceptions of both themselves and other people. Burnout which, in light of the definitions just provided, can also be referred to as chronic workplace stress, was first studied as an exploratory topic using primarily qualitative methods. The initial researchers were drawn to concepts from social and clinical psychology since they were familiar with these subjects. Concepts related to interpersonal connections, or how people see and treat others such as detached care, dehumanization for self-defense, and attribution processes, were used from a social perspective. Additionally, it introduced the ideas of emotion and motivation (and especially coping with emotional

arousal). The clinical perspective addressed motivation and emotion as well, although it did so more in terms of mental illnesses like depression. Later researchers came from the field of industrial-organizational psychology, which focused on attitudes and actions at work. Burnout was also viewed at this time as a type of workplace stress, although the organizational setting received more attention than the actual physical effects of stress itself. The three above-mentioned aspects of the experience of burnout were revealed by and thanks to this descriptive investigation. The words exhaustion, lack of energy, depletion, debilitation, and fatigue were also used to define the exhaustion dimension. Given the nature of human services employment, the cynical factor was first known as depersonalization, but it has also been referred to as unfavorable or inappropriate attitudes towards clients, irritation, loss of idealism, and disengagement, whereas diminished personal accomplishment, reduced productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope were all terms used to define the inefficacy component (Maslach C.; Leiter MP., 1997).

The next stage was to create metrics that could evaluate these qualities as they were more clearly characterized as burnout's traits. Many of the proposed measures relied on the apparent validity of the measuring items or statements, which varied depending on the assumptions made regarding burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was the first burnout measurement that was based on an extensive program of psychometric research (Maslach C.; Jackson SE, 1981; 2: 99-113). The MBI was created exclusively to evaluate the three aspects of burnout that had developed from earlier qualitative research (Maslach C. et al., 1996). It has been validated in numerous languages and is widely regarded as the industry standard for research in this area (Maslach C.; Leiter MP.; Schaufeli WB., 2009:86-108). Other early assessments of burnout, however, were inaccurate as they solely considered the factor of exhaustion leaving behind all the other components the burnout syndrome encompasses (Freudenberger HJ.; Richelson G., 1980).

This divergence between tests that evaluate diverse aspects of burnout and those that only measure exhaustion still exists today and reflects various conceptualizations of burnout. The Bergen Burnout Inventory (BBI), for instance, evaluates three aspects of burnout: fatigue at work, cynicism toward the purpose of work, and perception of inadequacy at work (Feldt T.; Rantanen J.; Hyvonen K. et al., 2014;52:102-12). Exhaustion and disengagement from work are two variables that are evaluated by the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) (Halbesleben JBR; Demerouti E., 2005). Other burnout assessments isolate weariness while making distinctions between its varied manifestations. For instance, the Shirom-Melamed Burnout Measure (SMBM) (Shiron A.; Melamed S., 2006;13: 176-200) as well as the

Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) make a distinction between physical depletion, emotional exhaustion, and cognitive weariness (Kristensen TS.; Borritz M.; Villadsen E. et al., 2005;19: 192-207).

Over the years, burnout prevention strategies have undergone additional adjustments and adaptations. Because caregiving jobs like health care and human services were the source of the early worry about burnout, the measures created in the 1980s tended to mirror those professions' experiences. Later, however, other occupational groups started to grow an interest in the occurrence of burnout, although they faced some challenges in customizing the available solutions for adapting them to their workplace. The MBI found the solution in the creation of a General Survey that could be used for and by any profession regardless of their own uniqueness and specificities (MBI-GS) (Schaufeli WB; Leiter MP; Maslach C. et al., 1996). The dimension of depersonalization, which was more unique to human services, was widened to relate to a negative detachment from work and was renamed as cynicism, in addition to being called professional efficacy. Other revisions included the broadening of the dimension of personal accomplishment. More recent burnout assessments started off with a language that was more occupation neutral as to refer to any kind of job no matter its occupational field. However, these actions also provided some new perspectives on the concept of burnout. The Spanish Burnout Inventory, for instance, has four dimensions which are totally different from the ones that were included in all the previous burnout assessments: zeal for the profession, mental tiredness, laziness, and guilt (Gil-Monte PR.; Figueiredo-Ferraz HH., 2013;57:959-68). In the meantime, some scholars created a new measure of interpersonal strain out of fear that the more neutral phrasing would mean a loss of the unique interpersonal concerns for human care employees (Borgogni L.; Consiglio C.; Alessandri G. et al., 2012;21:875-98). It still remains unclear whether these other factors evaluate events or circumstances that frequently go along with burnout or they are core components of burnout per se.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the understanding that burnout was a thing, with the awareness that it was a condition resulting from work-related stress at its apex, and with the knowledge that, if not managed properly, it could have turned into a real syndrome, researchers started to broaden their understanding of burnout by focusing on its beneficial opposite: "Engagement". Engagement at work has been provided with various definitions, though most people agree that it is a productive and fulfilling state within the occupational realm.

According to some researchers studying burnout, engagement is opposite to burnout and shares with the latter the same three aspects used to define it, but from a positive rather than a negative point of view. As a result, engagement entails a feeling of efficacy, significant involvement, and a high level of energy and commitment (Maslach C.; Leiter MP, 1999:275-302). By implication, the opposite pattern of scores on the three MBI dimensions is used to evaluate engagement.

“Work Engagement”, on the other hand, has been described as a consistent, satisfying affective-motivational state of fulfillment that is characterized by the three qualities of energy, devotion, and absorption. Based on this definition, work engagement is a separate, stand-alone concept which is independent from burnout, although it is negatively related to it, in the sense that it reduces as burnout rises. In the last decade, lots of studies have been conducted in an attempt to evaluate work engagement using a new tool called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli WB; Bakker AB; Salanova M., 2006;66:701-16).

Yet, there is still disagreement over the relationship between burnout and engagement. A recent strategy has tried to apply dialectical theory to combine opposing viewpoints on the two variables and create an alternative model (Leon MR.; Halbesleben JRB., 2015;2:87-96).

There are many different conceptual models describing how burnout develops and the consequences that follow. The relationship between the three components of burnout, which were commonly described in stages, was first the focus with high demands and overload that were initially thought to cause exhaustion, which would have subsequently led to detachment and adverse attitudes to other people and the job (depersonalization or cynicism). Feelings of failure and inadequacy would have followed if this continued (reduced personal accomplishment or professional inefficacy).

Burnout models have more recently been built upon notions about occupational stress and the idea that imbalances cause strain. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984 was the first of its kind, serving as a conceptual link between consecutive phases and imbalances (Cherniss C., 1980). With the model proposed, Lazarus and Folkman contended that a person's ability to cope with and adjust to issues and challenges is a result of transactions or interactions happening between a person and their environment and these are its three phases (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984):

- Job stressors (an imbalance between work demands and individual resources).
- Specific strain (an emotional response to exhaustion and anxiety).
- Protective coping (changes in attitudes and behavior, such as greater cynicism).

Since then, studies on the development of burnout have supported both the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) model which have evolved as two developmental frameworks explaining the imbalance between demands and resources. The JD-R model revolves around the idea that burnout develops when people endure constant job demands and have insufficient resources to deal with and lessen such expectations (Bakker AB.; Demerouti E., 2007;22:309-28). The COR model is based on the fundamental motivational theory asserting that repeated threats to resources lead to burnout (Hobfoll SE.; Freedy J., 1993:115-29). When people believe that the resources they value are in danger they work to protect them. Burnout may be worsened by resource loss whether it be concrete or predicted.

A different imbalance model of burnout is the Areas of Worklife (AW) model that frames workplace stressors in terms of person-job imbalances, or mismatches, but highlights six major areas in which these imbalances are observed: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Mismatches in these areas have an impact on a person's level of burnout, which in turn, affects a variety of outcomes, including work performance, social interactions, and personal well-being. As a matter of fact, burnout is more likely to occur when there is a bigger mismatch between a person and the job he or she is responsible for; on the other hand, employees are more likely to thrive and be engaged at work when there is a higher match between job demands and the resources a person has to fulfill those requirements. Cross-sectional and longitudinal researches have both offered preliminary empirical support for the AW model (Leiter MP.; Maslach C., 2004:91-134).

The majority of burnout models explicitly state the causal assumptions that burnout research has always made implicit: certain circumstances (both circumstantial and individual) lead to burnout, and once burnout happens, it has particular effects (both contextual and individual). However, there hasn't been any direct testing of these causal hypotheses. Cross-sectional research methods or analyses employing statistical causal models have been used in the majority of burnout investigations. Many of the suggested connections between burnout and its causes and effects have been confirmed by this correlational database, but it is difficult to address the presumptive causation of those connections. A greater opportunity to test sequential hypotheses is beginning to emerge with the recent growth in longitudinal studies during which a subject is observed repeatedly over a long period of time, but in order to reach stronger causal conclusions, the right methodological approaches are needed and these are frequently challenging to be applied in practical situations. The fact that several of the factors

have been evaluated through self-report measures is another important restriction (rather than other indices of behavior or health).

Thanks to the numerous attempts to measure and evaluate burnout, several organizational risk indicators have been discovered throughout the past two decades of burnout study in many different industries and nations (Schaufeli WB.; Enzmann D., 1998). As previously noted, six important domains have been identified: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The Demand-Control model of occupational stress takes into account the first two domains (Karasek R.; Theorell T., 1990) by asserting that burnout is a result of work overload since it reduces a person's ability to handle the demands of their position. There are few opportunities for rest, recovery, and balance restoration when this type of stress turns out to be a chronic work condition. In contrast, a realistic and sustainable workload gives people the chance and the time to develop new talents as well as to use and improve their current knowledge and skills. Proof suggests that burnout and loss of control have a definite relationship. Employees are more likely to feel engaged at work when they sense they are invested with the power to shape decisions that will affect their work, the freedom to practice professional autonomy, and access to the tools they need in order to accomplish their job tasks successfully. For what concerns the other four variables which are not discussed in the Demand-Control model of occupational stress, it should be noted that the ability of reinforcements to change behavior is referred to as the reward area. Of course, no matter how much one may love his job and enjoy the work environment promoted by the company he or she works for, rewards are still a large determinant of overall job satisfaction. It is for this very specific reason that people are more susceptible to burnout due to inadequate recognition and reward whether monetary, institutional, or social, which devalues both the work and the worker and is closely related to emotions of inefficacy. In contrast, there are opportunities for both pecuniary incentives and intrinsic fulfillment when there is consistency in the reward dimension between the employee and the task. The persistent ties employees have with coworkers fall under the category of community. Burnout is more likely to be experienced in partnerships with a lack of support and trust as well as unresolved conflict. Instead, when these relationships are productive at work, there is a lot of social support, employees have efficient and sufficient channels for resolving conflicts, and they are more likely to feel engaged and thrive. Therefore, if a firm has a positive work environment, it will probably develop the so-called organizational culture, namely the collection of traits that make a company what it is or the collection of expectations, practices and values that guide and inform the actions of all employees, which will further enhance the sense of community

(Wong K., 2020). The study of equity and social justice leads to the concept of fairness, with the latter being defined as the degree to which the decisions made at work are viewed as fair and equitable. When making decisions, people assess their standing in the community by the standard of the procedures and how they are treated themselves. When people believe they are not being treated with respect, they are inclined to become cynical, angry, and hostile. Last but not least, the values area takes on the cognitive-emotional weight of work goals and expectations. Since values transcend beyond the purely utilitarian exchange of time for money or development, they serve as the motivating connection between the worker and the company. Given that values are the principles and motives that initially drew people to their jobs, employees will find themselves choosing between the job they want to perform and that they have to do when there is a values conflict at work and a resulting gap between individual and organizational ideals. This can increase burnout.

In terms of results and outcomes, burnout has frequently been linked to a range of unfavorable responses and work disengagement, including turnover, job discontent, lack of organizational commitment, absenteeism, and intentions to quit. Burnout, for instance, mediates the association between being bullied at work and the intention to quit, with cynicism being found to be the key component of burnout that predicts turnover (Leiter MP.; Maslach C., 2009;17:331-9). Burnout, on the other hand, results in decreased productivity and lower-quality performances for those who continue working (Laschinger H.; Wong CA.; Grau AL., 2012;49:1266-76). Burnout is linked to lower job satisfaction and a decreased commitment to the position or organization as it reduces opportunity for rewarding work experiences. People affected by the burnout syndrome can negatively influence their coworkers by escalating interpersonal friction and interfering with work responsibilities, therefore, burnout can spread throughout the workplace taking on organizational dimensions (Bakker AB.; LeBlanc PM.; Schaufeli WB., 2005;51:276-87). Studies suggesting that burnout increases in work contexts characterized by interpersonal violence highlight the vital relevance of social ties for burnout (Gascon S.; Leiter MP.; Andres E. et al., 2013;22:3120-9). These results reveal that burnout should not only be viewed as an individual syndrome but also as a characteristic of workgroups, thus it assumes collective proportions (Gonzalez-Morales M.; Peiro JM.; Rodriguez I. et al., 2012;25:43-61).

The relationship between burnout and health is quite complicated since both factors affect one other: burnout contributes to poor health, while poor health contributes to burnout (Ahola K.; Hakanen J., 2014:10-31). Exhaustion is, of the three burnout characteristics, the one that most closely resembles a traditional stress variable, making it easier to predict stress-related health

consequences than either of the other two dimensions. Stress symptoms like headaches, persistent fatigue, gastrointestinal issues, muscle tension, hypertension, cold or flu episodes, and sleep troubles are frequently related to exhaustion. These physiological correlations are similar to those discovered with other long-term stress markers. Burnout and substance misuse have been linked in studies that have produced similar results (Burke RJ.; Shearer J.; Deszca G., 1984;7:162-88). For example, burnout was found to be a predictor of eventual hospital admissions for cardiovascular issues in a ten-year longitudinal study of industrial workers (Toppinen-Tanner S.; Ahola K.; Koskinen A. et al., 2009;25:287-96). According to other studies, a one-unit increase in burnout was linked to a 1.4-unit increase in the likelihood of being admitted to the hospital for mental health issues as well as a one-unit increase in the risk of being hospitalized for cardiovascular issues. Other studies have examined the relationship between burnout and cardiovascular diseases in more depth, underlying the importance of high-sensitivity C-reactive protein and fibrinogen concentrations (Toker S.; Shirom A.; Shapira I. et al., 2005;10:344-62).

### **3.2 J-DR model: a tool to manage burnout**

Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli developed the JD-R model in 2001, building on earlier theories on work-related stress. The goal is to try to understand the causes of burnout while also foreseeing workers' level of well-being (in terms of health and expenditure of physical and mental energy) as well as their future productivity at work.

The authors assert that everything would result from an equilibrium (or disequilibrium) between positive characteristics (resources) and negative characteristics (demands) that define the specific work done by each individual. According to them, workplace demands are “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of work that demand physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with some physical and psychological costs”, such as conflicts or job insecurity (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501). Instead, labor resources are defined as “those physical, social, or organizational aspects of work that are characterized by one or more of the following aspects: getting feedback and social support are two examples of factors that are functional to achieving professional goals, reducing labor demands and associated physical and psychological costs, and stimulating growth and personal development” (Demerouti et al., 2001, p. 501).

According to the model, requests and resources give life to two independent processes. The first is the process of health impairment: excessive work demands that prevent the worker from resting might lead to a high level of activity and an excessive use of energy, which may



result in symptoms such as exhaustion (which is an energy component of burnout), psychiatric symptoms, and health damage.

The second process is the motivational one. When an individual's psychological needs, such as those for autonomy or competence, are met by their resources at work, it leads to commitment and motivation on the part of the worker. Conversely, when there is a lack of resources, individuals start to engage in regressive behaviors, which is what causes burnout. In essence, labor resources play a protective role for workers, lessening the adverse effects of labor demands.

The model has come to be considered as a true and independent theory (JD-R Theory), including precursors and consequences of burnout and occupational impotence, feedback cycles, worker-specific behaviors, and assigning a central role to the component of work engagement. Subsequent research has allowed for a more precise observation of the effects that requests and resources may have on well-being and performance interacting between them (Bakker e Costa, 2014; Bakker e Demerouti, 2014).

According to the authors, there are two ways in which these factors can interact: in the first scenario, resources contain the potential impact that requests may have on the worker's health, assisting them in adapting to them; in the second scenario, requests increase the impact of the resources on the worker's motivation and sense of responsibility; it is evident from the research that the resources play a stronger protective role in presence of other people.

Additionally, the authors distinguish between two types of workplace demands: challenge demands, or those that, while requiring effort from the worker, lead to growth and increase vigor, energy, and resolution (for example, responsibility or time pressure), and hindrance demands, which call for effort but impede growth and learning and harm the worker's health and motivation (for instance, conflicts). Both these types of requests are positively correlated with workers' burnout, but only challenge demands lead to the development of commitment and involvement (engagement), whereas hindrance requests have the opposite effect.

The research conducted starting from 2004 allowed for certain model modification; it particularly favored the addition of the job engagement factor as a factor affecting the relationship between resources and labor productivity. The term "job engagement" refers to a state of mind associated with work that is characterized by vigor (high levels of energy and resilience), dedication (a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and stimulation), and assimilation (focus and positive involvement) (Schaufeli e Taris, 2014, p.46). The structure of work engagement corresponds to an increased level of activity in the performance of enjoyable activities as compared to the structures of burnout, job satisfaction, and workaholism.

The health and performance of employees are positively affected by work engagement; research has shown that certain aspects of work engagement are correlated with, for instance, physical health and, in particular, good heart activity, proactive behavior on the part of the workers, which translates into greater commitment, and facilitates the relationship job-family, with a consequent increase in partners' well-being.

As a result, there will be improved performance, a decrease in absenteeism, organizational citizenship and active learning behaviors, as well as greater client satisfaction and employee engagement. The introduction of personal resources, also known as individual resources, is a significant extension of the model. These resources are defined as "those positive self-evaluations that influence positively the perception of [one's] own abilities and capacity to control and act successfully on one's own environment" (Bakker e Demerouti, 2014, p. 12; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis e Jackson, 2003): for instance, optimism and toughness.

These self-evaluations have a positive impact on people's motivation and level of satisfaction, leading to higher-level performances. It is not yet clear how these individual resources could be included in the model given that human behavior is the result of the interaction between personal and environmental characteristics; but in regard to, there are now five different hypotheses (Schaufeli and Taris, 2014):

- Personal resources act as moderators in the relationship between occupational characteristics and well-being;
- The role of personal resources as moderators in the relationship between occupational and well-being characteristics;
- Personal resources relating to occupational and well-being characteristics;
- Personal resources affect how the characteristics of the job are perceived;
- The personal resources function as a variable third factor in addition to requests and work resources.

We might infer from this that personal resources are a key variable in the model. Given the nearly infinite conceptualization possibilities for these resources and the wide range of potential relationships between personal and work-related resources, systematic research on the topic is still lacking. However, the growing interest in the topic and the need for a more in-depth understanding raise the prospect of a future improvement in the understanding of the various dynamics between individual factors and other variables.

This type has proven to be very popular due to its tremendous flexibility. For this reason, it does not focus on specific requests or resources for work but rather takes into account any

factor that is present in the working environment, including any request and any resource. In this way, it is adaptable to a wide range of occupations and work environments, each time taking into account the unique characteristics of the activity under consideration.

Other differences from the original models relate to its "bilaterality": it considers both motivation and burnout, two factors that have always been researched and analyzed separately. The second reason is that it is more complicated and dynamic: by removing any static characteristics listed as inappropriate and ineffective for the working activity and taking into consideration the changing nature of work, demands and labor resources are seen as dynamic and ever-evolving elements.

The JD-R model serves as a theoretical framework that is helpful to define reliable assessment tools and to identify risk and protection variables inside companies. Effective interventions can be created based on these evaluations to positively affect employees' behavior and attitudes, enhancing organizational well-being and performance (Bakker, 2013; Emanuel et al., 2015). For a number of reasons, the model can be easily used as a guide for interventions within organizations and firms, as Schaufeli and Taris (2014; Bakker, Demerouti, and Sanz-Vergel, 2014) contend.

- The model can be adjusted in turn to the particular demands of the organizations, taking into account both common characteristics and specific features, as long as a small number of variables are not taken into consideration.
- They are viewed both as negative processes and results, as in earlier models of stress, and as positive ones, making them useful for identifying paths that help prevent burnout and psychosomatic issues while also boosting employee commitment, motivation, and productivity.
- It can be utilized by many groups within a firm that deal with human resources, allowing for collaboration between those who deal with organizational health and those who want more people to participate in work activities or learning new skills.

To apply the JD-R model in the practice of organizational consultation, a reference framework is used for an eight-step process, called the JD-R Monitor.

- **Definition of the situation and the problem:** The procedure starts when a company acknowledges that it has an issue with both human resource management and organizational or occupational health.
- **Design of the project:** The consultant works with various members of the organization to identify the key elements that should be represented in the model, such as the particular requirements and available resources at work, one's own resources,

the connections between the various variables, and potential behavioral outcomes. Interpersonal disputes, insecurity, and overwork are instances of demands; autonomy, knowledge, the existence of strong leadership, and social support are examples of resources. Optimism, self-reliance, and resilience are all examples of personal resources. Positive behavioral results include contentment, participation, and good health, while negative outcomes include absenteeism, depression, and ill health.

- **Communication within the organization:** A communication campaign is necessary to tell employees about the procedure that is being implemented. This can include meetings with employees, emails, postings on the intranet of the business, and announcements on the bulletin boards. It is crucial to communicate the significance and seriousness of the study you want to conduct, regardless of the methods (or methodologies) that are used.
- **Data collection:** Each employee receives an email with a link to the questionnaire website, which must be completed anonymously and voluntarily. The information gathered must be kept in a secure location where only the counselors can have access to it. The workers receive quick feedbacks on their results at the conclusion of the compilation; in the event of discrepancies or newly discovered issues, within the return there are recommendations and invitations to take the most appropriate steps.
- **Analysis and reporting:** In order to draft both a general report for the entire organization (or particular departments/functions) and individual reports for each employee, data are evaluated. There will be recommendations and ideas for potential courses of action in both situations.
- **Return of results:** The study's findings are given to the employees during this phase, and they engage in frank discussion about them. This restitution must be made at every organizational level, from directional to executive.
- **Interventions:** Based on the outcomes from earlier stages, the most relevant actions are currently being implemented at different levels. These interventions can take a variety of forms. Individually, employees attempt to lessen the demands of their jobs and improve their resources, including personal ones. They may do this by addressing coworkers and superiors or by seeking the advice of a consultant. On the other hand, learning and information programs as well as specialized training for various personal and organizational needs can be designed at the organizational level.
- **Evaluation:** Since evaluation entails starting over with the JD-R Monitor's various phases, it is not a true step. It is crucial to assess the process' usefulness, the accuracy

of the changes made, and the accomplishment of the intended outcomes. In order to maintain the improvements an organization has made from its first survey onwards; systematic monitoring every two years is crucial.

## **4. Statistical evidence on workplace stress**

### **4.1 Gallup report**

Based on the “State of the global workplace 2022 Report” issued by Gallup, a global analytics and advice firm helping leaders and organizations to solve their most urgent problems, we are able to observe how employees around the world experienced life and work in 2021 as a valuable predictor of organizational performance. According to the Gallup World Poll, average full-time workers spend 41.36 hours per week working and, as a result, stress among employees worldwide has been on the rise over the past decade, reaching record levels in 2020. Assuming that people work 48 weeks a year, they spend 1,985.28 hours per year working. By considering that life expectancy is estimated to stand at 73, according to the OECD countries<sup>1</sup>, people retire when they’re about 63 years old. And given that the average person works 41 years, those years of work at 1,985.28 hours per year is equal to 81, 396 total hours people spend working in a lifetime. But one might think that since people spend most of their life working, life at work is going well. Unfortunately, this is not the situation, in fact Gallup found 60% of the world’s workers to be emotionally detached and 19% of them being miserable or “actively disengaged”. Therefore, the workplace proverb “find a job that you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work again in your life.” has proven to be an illusion because “work”, intended by the Oxford Languages as “the activity involving mental of physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result”, is rarely performed without stress, worry or even pain. This is the reason why leaders have created novel techniques to avoid labor as much as possible due to the suffering that comes with it. There are currently widespread efforts to achieve “work-life balance” as those of introducing four-day workweeks, and increasing remote work. But it’s not simply the hours, inequality or location that leaves workers unhappy. What’s making people miserable at work is what’s going on there. Balance, for instance, is crucial yet requires a division between work and personal life.

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<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental organization which counts 38 member countries. It was founded in 1961 with the aim to stimulate economic progress and world trade.

It's challenging to emotionally separate work from everything else in life. In a Gallup poll conducted in Germany, 51% of actively disengaged workers claimed that family conflict was a result of job stress. So, what makes a bad job? In one of the largest studies on burnout, Gallup discovered that "unfair treatment at work" was the main cause. Then followed by an untenable workload, murky manager communication, a lack of manager assistance, and an unreasonable time pressure. These five reasons all have your boss in common. If it's bad, your job will almost certainly make you miserable. A lousy employer will treat you poorly, ignore you, and never encourage and support you. Anyone could feel miserable in such a setting. The impact of a manager is so great that merely getting to know the boss may help Gallup anticipate 70% of the variation in team engagement. As a consequence, in order to improve life at work, better leaders must be chosen, managers in the workplace have to be supportive, good listeners and collaborators. What makes a manager great is his capability to help colleagues grow, make them feel cared about and recognize their colleagues for their hard work. In such environments, workers thrive. This type of work atmosphere may seem like a pipe dream to 79 percent of employees, but it is a reality for 21 percent of them. They still experience tension, worry, and discomfort on occasion, but half as frequently as those who are actively disengaged from their jobs. In fact, 87 percent of those who are thriving at work say they often smile and laugh and 95 percent say they are treated with respect throughout the day. Comparing business units with happy employees to those with unhappy employees, the profit of the former is increased by 23%. Teams with thriving employees also show much fewer absenteeism, attrition, and accidents, as well as higher levels of client loyalty. The key message is that no one's agenda conflicts with workplace wellbeing. All CEOs should be interested in the success of the workforce worldwide. And the first step in ensuring the prosperity of all workers is to listen to them.

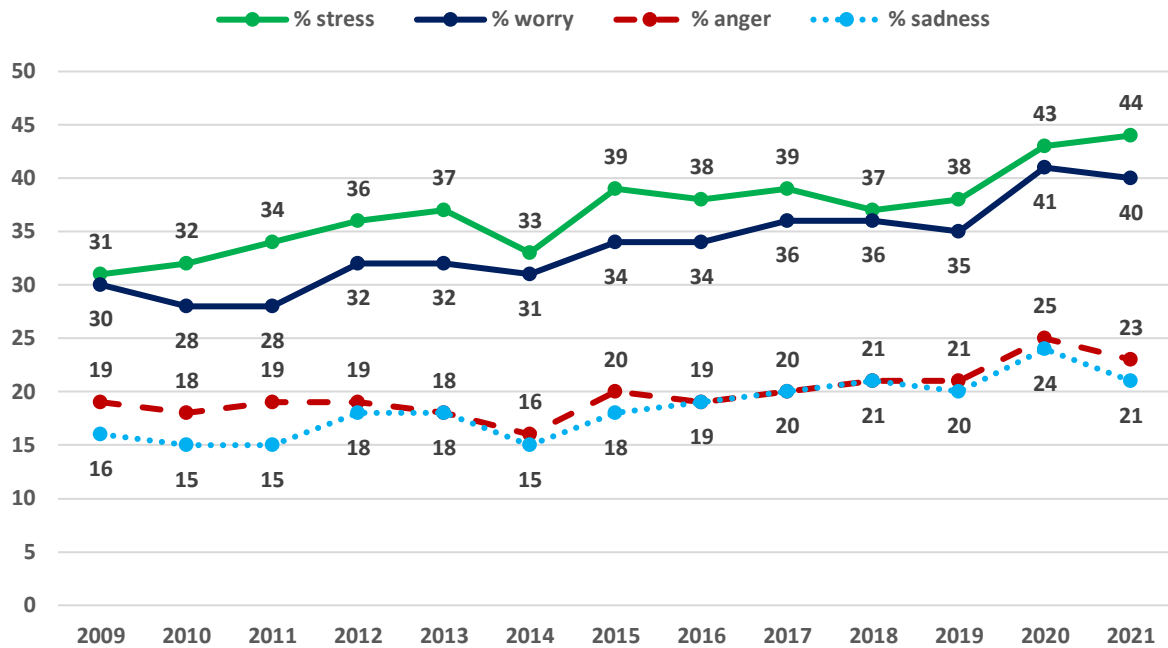
The Gallup "State of the global workplace 2022 Report" registers data regarding global workers' engagement and well-being in 2021. Year 2021 has been a peculiar one since people from all around the world found themselves right in the middle of a major sanitary emergence. From 2020 in fact, following the Coronavirus outbreak which affected all countries worldwide equally regardless of cross-cultural, demographic and political or welfare differences, global workers experienced severe burnout and remained under the heavy burden of having to deal with and trying to manage the unknown. With "unknown" meaning the health and sanitary sphere but also having to adjust to the new working measures that were being put in place by governments. From the moment Covid-19 was declared to be harmful for the global population, countries gradually decided to stop the pandemic by protecting

people's health and lives. As a consequence, schools, factories, companies and anything else which was not strictly necessary for subsistence were temporarily shut down, but still, the economy had to continue to grow as it couldn't afford to be losing more than it was already. In order to do so, companies started to adopt and implement new working tools such as smartworking which allowed employees to work from home thus, to keep on undertaking their responsibilities while being in a safe place. Maybe it is because of the uncertainty people are living in for two years now and also because of these new working conditions that people feel more stressed and as a result their engagement has diminished (Gallup Inc., 2022).

But first of all, what does employee engagement mean? According to Gallup, employee engagement is the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace (Gallup, I. 2022). It can be based on a number of different factors such as: working hours, workloads, interpersonal relationships, career paths and others. Employee engagement is important because workers are involved in decision-making processes and they take actions that can influence a company's organization. Following 50 years of researches on employee engagement, Gallup was able to affirm that better business results are produced by employees that feel engaged in what they do compared to other employees who instead are simply putting in their time, but unfortunately statistics show that only 15% of the global employees is engaged while the remaining 85% is not. At this point, one might ask whose responsibility is employee engagement. It should in fact be a manager's primary role responsibility because managers must ensure that employees know exactly the tasks to be performed, they have to support and help their employees if and when necessary, and they are also in charge of explaining them how their work connects to organizational success as to make sure that individuals' objectives are in line with the companies' interests. To be a successful manager, the latter must be in constant contact with its employees as it is proven that employees who get daily feedbacks on their performances from their manager are three times more likely to be engaged with respect to those who are given a feedback once in a blue moon. In order to create good managers, leaders have to redesign managers' roles and expectations, they must provide the training tools, development and resources managers need to meet those expectations, last they have to create evaluation practices that help managers accurately measure performance, hold employees accountable and coach to the future. Gallup identifies five key drivers of employee engagement: purpose, development, caring managers, ongoing conversations and focus on strengths. In order to be motivated and invest in their job, to be productive and pursue the objectives of the company, people want a purpose, they want to be considered for the characteristics that make them unique. Moreover, they want to build

interpersonal relationships, particularly with their manager who is the one capable of coaching them to the next step. Therefore, key drivers of employee engagement have undergone a huge change from the past to present days since in the past what workers valued the most was their satisfaction, their boss, their paychecks, annual reviews, weaknesses, in one word what mattered mostly was the job they had. On the contrary, nowadays priority is life and the quality of it in the workplace and this is why a shift has occurred in what drives employee engagement. But why then, if objectives have changed, there is still an 85% of the employees worldwide actively disengaged at work? Because employee engagement is mainly considered an HR responsibility. Front-line employees do not understand it, nor are leaders expected to own it or managers to expect it. As a result, before they fully examine "engagement capacity "s to improve their business, some firms assume they have used all of its performance levers. Despite repeated attempts to raise scores, some leaders consistently have poor engagement, or they plateau and finally fall. Other times, while having strong engagement levels, their business outcomes paint a different picture. At this point, the failure of employee engagement is to be attributed to the way in which employee engagement programs are implemented. On the contrary, leaders who make engagement part of their corporate strategy witness significant outcomes year by year. Before the pandemic, employee engagement showed a positive increasing trend at a global level, but with Covid-19 progress has stopped increasing by 1% in 2021 compared to 2020, but still remaining under its peak registered in 2019. With no doubts, this major sanitary event halted a long period of gradual but still general improvement among the world's workers. During these last two challenging years, besides the fact that employee engagement has stalled, also stress among the global working population reached its maximum (Gallup, I. 2022).





According to Gallup, if we were to ask employees the following question: “Did you experience such feelings during a lot of the day yesterday? How about worry, anger, sadness and stress?” we would get the above-pictured scenario with stress constantly increasing and worry which has decreased by 1% from 2020 but it is still very high in value.

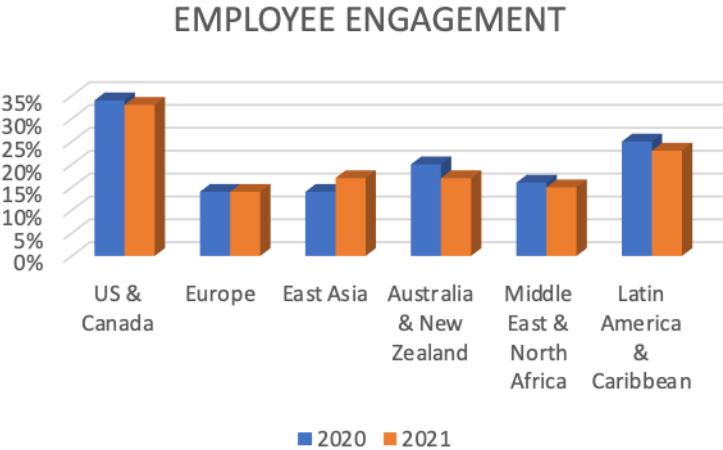
That is why many companies have decided or otherwise should be open to design some strategies to be put in place in order to focus on employees’ well-being which is key to an organization’s success and workplace productivity. In contrast to what some might think, engagement and well-being are two sides of the same coin as they interact in powerful ways. We are frequently brought to believe that wellbeing occurs outside of work and that engagement occurs in the workplace, but Gallup's data reveals that people's experiences at work impact their personal and private lives as well. High degrees of burnout at work are a common occurrence for employees, who report finding it challenging to stick to their family obligations. General wellbeing affects work-life balance. The chance of sustained burnout is 61 percent higher for employees who are engaged at work but not thriving than for those who are and for these individuals the possibility of reporting higher daily stress levels is 48 percent higher. When comparing data through engagement and thriving, Gallup found quite striking results. Employees in fact, when thriving and engaged at work, perceive less stress from 49% down to 30%, less anger and health diseases. Therefore, companies must care about the whole person as a human and not just as a worker or employee. Assessments of employee wellbeing must be put in the agenda for leaders since as part of their employer brand promise, they also need to give priority to employee wellbeing. Leaders that care about the welfare of their

employees create organizations that are successful as well as thriving individuals, families, and communities (Gallup Inc., 2022).

Based on the Gallup report of 2022 I decided to make a comparative analysis of some of the countries' data registered by taking into account only some of the indicators considered in the report. The indicators hereby analyzed are the following:

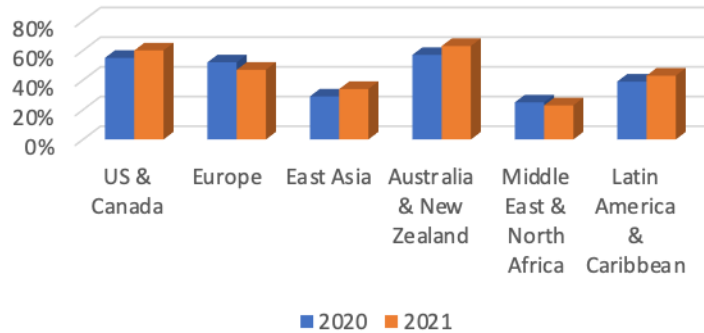
- Employee engagement
- Life evaluation
- Daily stress
- Daily sadness
- Daily worry
- Social

Concerning the above-mentioned six factors, only six global regions have been examined, specifically the areas of US & Canada, Europe, East Asia, Australia & New Zealand, Middle East & North Africa, Latin America & Caribbean.



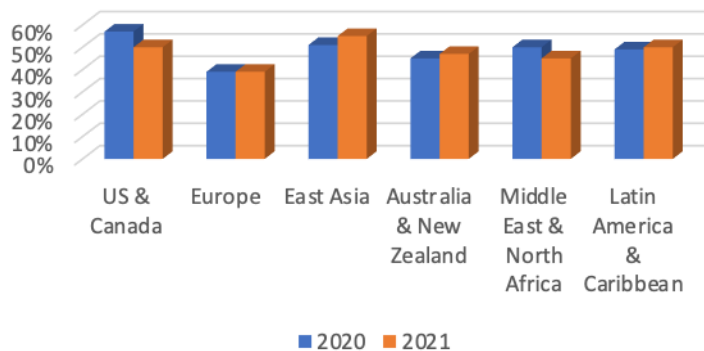
Employee engagement is defined as the enthusiasm and involvement of workers at work. The graph shows that employee engagement decreased on average from 2020 to 2021 for all countries except for East Asia, which on the contrary registered an increasing employee engagement. The highest rates of employee engagement have been registered in the US & Canada and in Latin America & Caribbean, respectively accounting for 33% and 23% in 2021. From my point of view East Asian employees are more engaged and are thriving at work because of their cultural values which entail high commitment to one's job and collectivism.

## LIFE EVALUATION



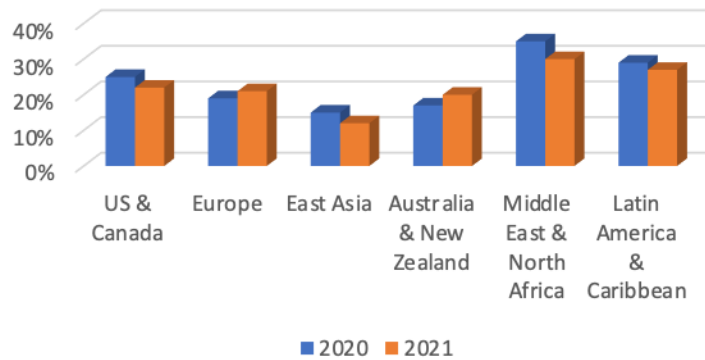
Life evaluation refers to the perception people have about their life when thinking about it. Here, evidence underlines an increasing trend in most of the regions considered. The only regions that seem to go in the opposite direction are Europe and Middle East & North Africa. The highest value is the one of Australia & New Zealand which according to research are ranked as the happiest countries in the world and by chance they happen to have been the countries less affected by the pandemic.

## DAILY STRESS



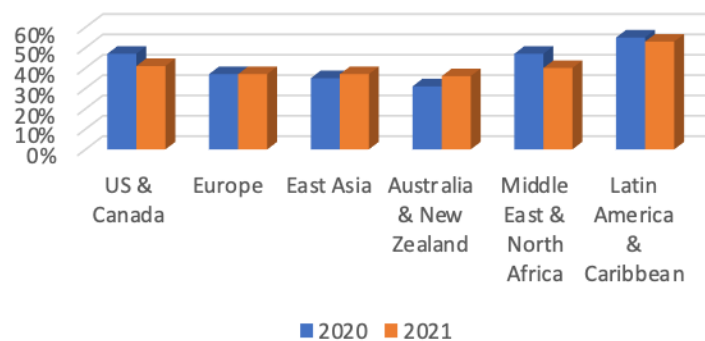
Daily stress refers to job strains or annoyances linked to routine daily activities and transactions of everyday life. The daily stress indicator didn't report substantial changes, and this might be because people were mainly working from home during 2021 due to Covid-19 outbreak. However, the most significant evolutions are the ones experienced by the US & Canada and East Asia. In the western part of the world, daily stress lessened shifting from 57% to 50% whereas in the eastern part increased up to 55%. The case of Europe is quite interesting since from 2020 to 2021 daily stress remained stable.

## DAILY SADNESS



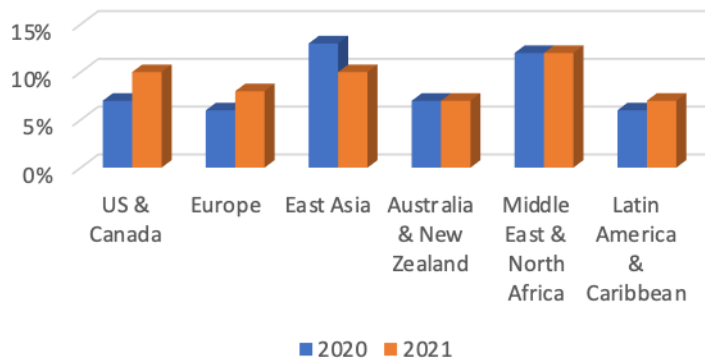
Daily sadness is defined as a prolonged feeling of sadness or low mood which eventually results in loss of interests in tasks to be performed at work especially those that were previously found fulfilling. Here we witness really low values in East Asia as opposed to those of Middle East & North Africa where we find daily sadness at its maximum (30%). Generally speaking, we can state that daily sadness is higher in poorer and underdeveloped countries.

## DAILY WORRY



Daily worry in the workplace refers to stress caused by work that leads to anxiety. As in the case of daily sadness highly industrialized, thus richer countries such as Europe, East Asia, US & Canada, Australia & New Zealand, appear to be less worried. In contrast, Latin America & Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, report higher levels of worry and may depend on a minor availability of work, but also on their lower disposable incomes.

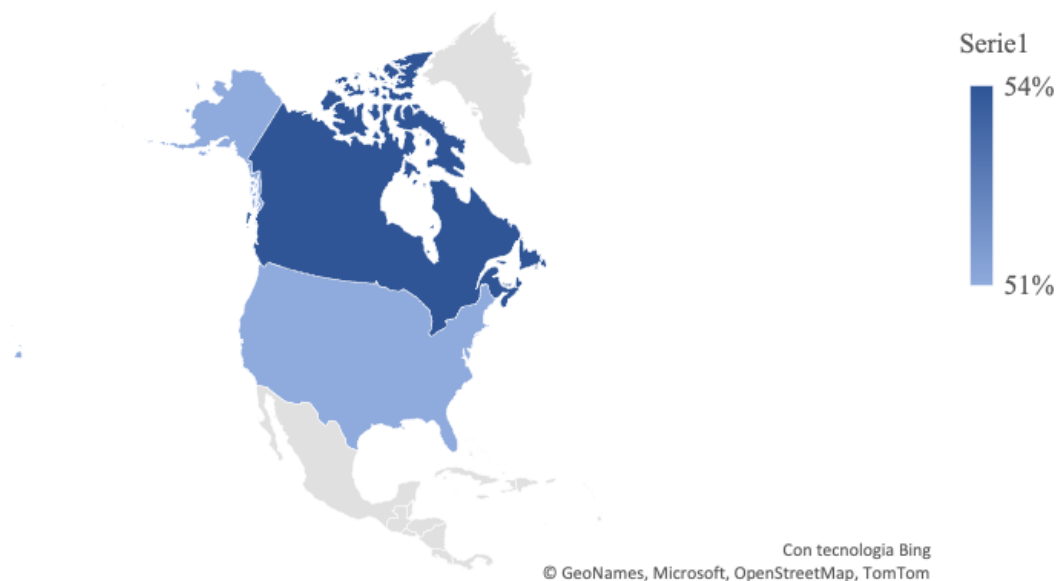
## SOCIAL



Social refers to interpersonal relationships at work and so, according to Gallup, responds to the question: “Were you treated with respect all day yesterday?”. Interpersonal relationships seem to have improved quite remarkably from 2020 to 2021 and this makes us think that the world is going in the direction of human development.

At the end of the previous analysis, given the fact that this subject of this chapter is mainly stress and its possible implications on people and particularly on employees I felt I should concentrate my comparative analysis on the daily stress variable. Because of the territorial, political, economic and social disparities existing amongst these two areas and also due to the fact that, in recent years they have become global competitors I decided to focus on US & Canada and East Asia.

## DAILY STRESS - US & CANADA



## DAILY STRESS - EAST ASIA



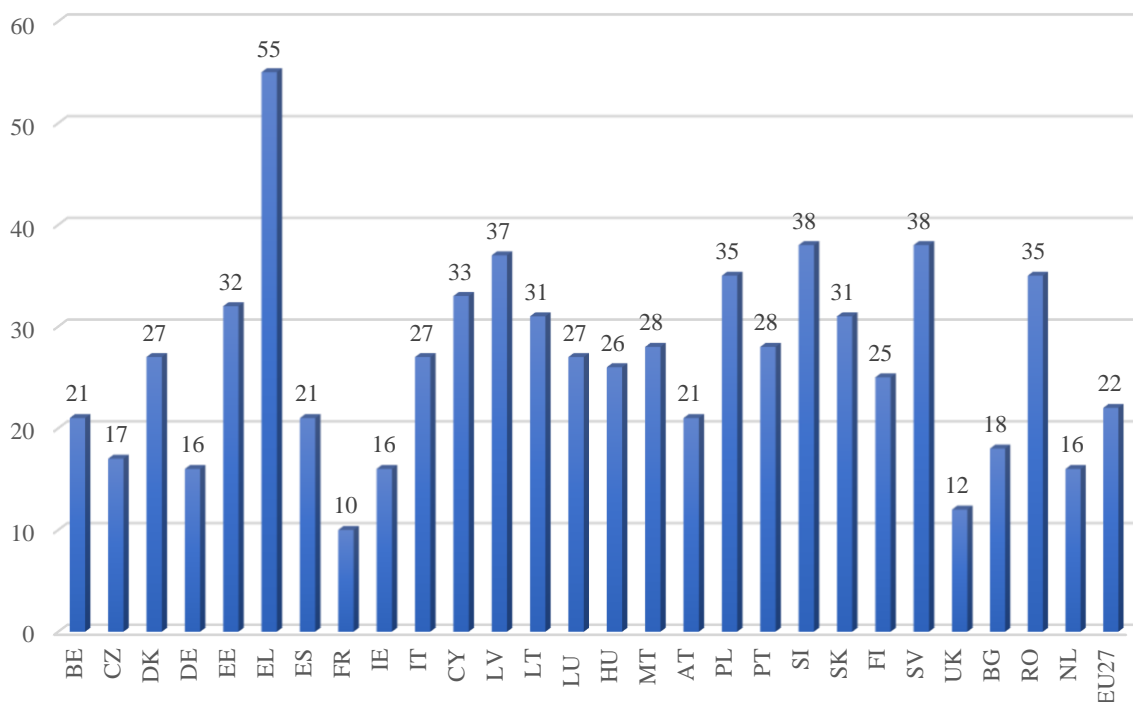
As we can see from the graphs, daily stress in East Asia registers wider gaps between its countries if compared to those of US & Canada. In East Asia stress levels are higher in China, Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, whereas in Canada stress is at its peak. This analysis though contains some bias as on the one hand we are considering two highly industrialized and developed countries which have been on the technological frontier for quite a long time now, on the other hand we have developing countries which are present in the international scenario and dispose of the newest technologies, yet still lots of progresses must be made in terms of human development. The differences between these two areas considering the cases of China and the United States find explanation in the fact that the former is a collectivistic country while the latter is individualistic, therefore, from my perspective, China experiences lower levels of stress because workers move towards the same goal attainment, whereas the United States have to manage the downsides of each employee thinking autonomously without considering the long-term impacts on the others.

Even though the data we have just analyzed are detailed, the literature on the matter doesn't provide us with less recent reports therefore no long-term comparisons can be made. Other than the lack of information on the changes that occurred overtime, the other limit of these statistics is the bias contained in the data collected. In fact, as the years considered are the years 2020 and 2021 and therefore the period in which the pandemic was affecting negatively not only work but also all the other aspects of human lives, it is not possible to understand the degree to which those data are realistic, and it is not possible to foresee the future trends of the factors we considered (Gallup Inc., 2022).

## 4.2 OSHA report

In order to reduce the bias contained in the previous study on work-related stress I would like to present another research conducted by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in 2009, which analyses work-related stress and its changes from 1990 to 2005. As stated by Jukka Takala, director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, work-related stress represents one of the biggest health and safety challenges Europe is facing. Thus, this report which focuses on all the EU members states, discusses the trends on work-related stress (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2009).

### WORK RELATED STRESS BY COUNTRIES 2005



As pointed out by the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, workers who experienced work-related stress in 2005 accounted for the 22% of the total working population on average from 25 EU Member States and 2 Acceding Countries (those who have signed the treaty of accession and are expected to become full member states on the date set out in the treaty) surveyed (EU 27).

The new Member States (EU10) have a significantly higher stress prevalence than that of the old Member States (EU15). Work-related stress was reported by 20% of workers in the EU15, 30% of workers in the EU10, and 31% of workers in acceding countries (AC 2). Significant differences were observed, however, among the nations within these three groups. Greece had the highest stress level (55 percent), followed by Slovenia, Sweden (38 percent), and Latvia

(37 percent). Lowest stress levels were found in the UK (12%), Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands (16%), the Czech Republic (17%), and France and Bulgaria (18%) (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

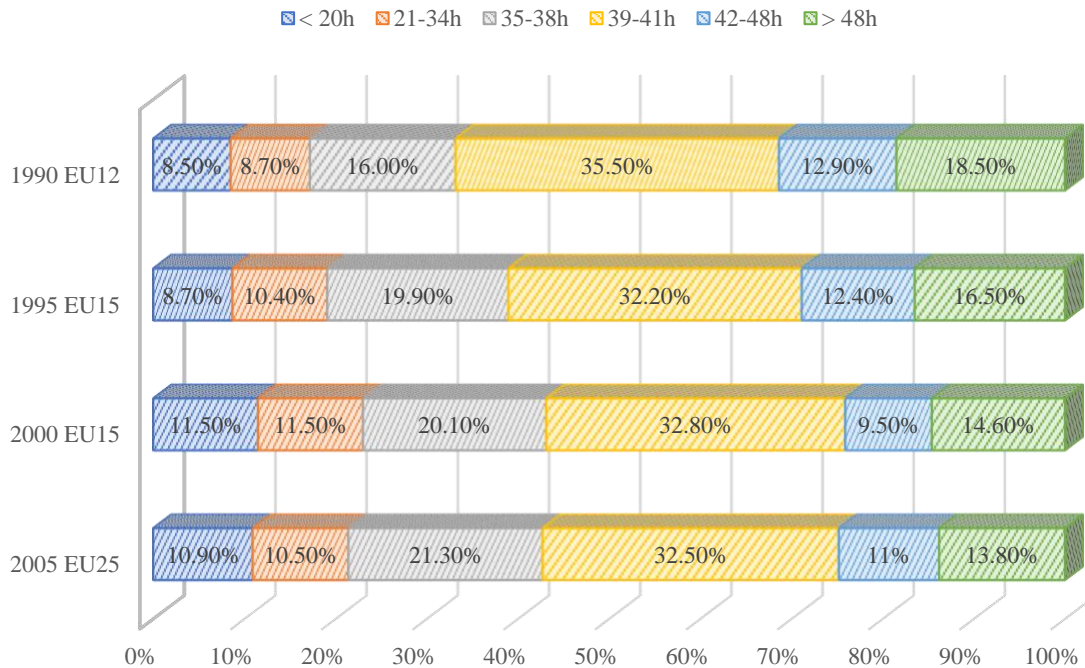
**STRESS AND STRESS-RELATED OUTCOMES - PREVALENCE AND TIME TRENDS (% YES)**

Question	EU15			CC12
	1995	2000	2005	2001
Does your work affect your health	57	60	31	69
Stress	28	28	20	28
Overall fatigue	20	23	18	41
Headaches	13	15	13	15
Backache	30	33	21	34
Irritability	11	11	10	11
Sleeping problems	7	8	8	8
Anxiety	7	7	8	7
Heart disease	1	1	1.4	4.8

Other stress-related outcomes (with the exception of anxiety) are also higher in the new EU countries. Overall strain was reported by 18 percent of workers in EU15, 41 percent in EU10, and 44 percent in AC2 in 2005; headaches by 13 percent, 24 percent, and 28 percent, respectively; backache by 21 percent and 39 percent in both EU10 and AC2; and sleeping problems by 8 percent, 12 percent, and 16 percent of workers, respectively. Significant differences were also observed in heart disease statistics. This problem is faced by 1.4 percent of EU15 workers, 5.6 percent of EU10 workers, and as many as 8.1 percent of AC2 workers. The level of irritability and anxiety was similar across all countries, with 10-12% reporting irritability and 7-9% reporting anxiety (Karasek, R.A. & Theorell, T., 1990; Paoli, P. & Merllié, D., 2001; Paoli, P. & Parent-Thirion, A., 2003; Paoli, P., 1997).



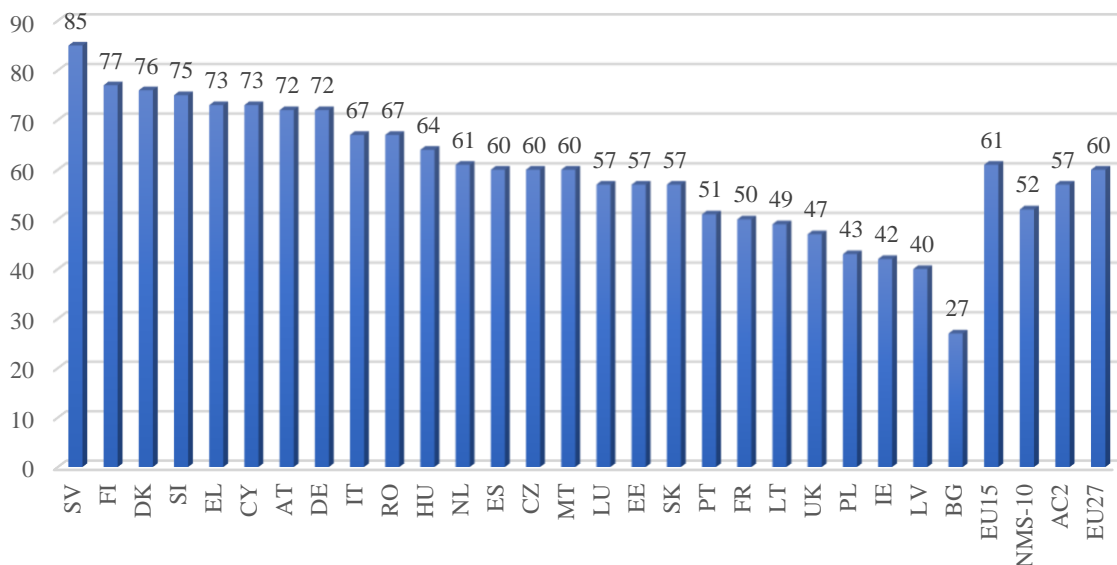
## EVOLUTION OF WEEKLY WORKING HOURS



Data shows that weekly hours of work are decreasing in European nations. The European Working Condition Surveys conducted in 1991, 1995, and 2000 revealed a gradual decrease in the percentage of individuals working more than 41 hours per week in the EU15 countries, while the percentage of those working fewer than 34 hours per week increased. This trend slowed after 2005, when ten new countries with longer working hours entered the European Union. Nonetheless, even in 2005, fewer people (averagely 14 percent) were obliged to work long hours across the EU than in previous years ('long working hours' implies a working week with 48 or more hours, according to the metrics used for the fourth EWCS).

In the EU, the trend toward shorter working hours is paired by an increase in the prevalence of part-time work. This type of work is particularly common in the Netherlands (34%), the United Kingdom (29%), and the Czech Republic (6%) (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006; Daniels K., 2004).

## WORKING AT VERY HIGH SPEED IN EU COUNTRIES (% OF WORKERS) (2005)



Shorter working hours, on the other hand, are accompanied by an increase in work intensity. The European Working Conditions Polls from 1991 to 2005 show a consistent increase in the number of participants who report working at least 3/4 of the time at very great speed (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007). In 2005, 46 percent of EU25 respondents chose this response.

Although overall work pace is increasing, countries seem to register substantial disparities. Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Slovenia had the highest percentage of workers reporting working at very high rates of speed in 2005. (85 percent, 77 percent, 76 percent, and 75 percent respectively). Poland, Ireland, Latvia, and, in particular, Bulgaria had the lowest percentage (43 percent, 42 percent, 40 percent, and 27 percent respectively). On average, more EU15 workers (61 percent) reported working at very high speeds than EU10 (52 percent) or AC2 (57 percent). There is also a growth in the number of employees who report having to work to tight deadlines. However, the differences among EU countries in this field are not as pronounced. In 2005, 62 percent of EU15 workers, 59 percent of EU10 workers, and 60 percent of AC2 workers reported working under tight deadlines.

According to the Working Life Barometer in the Baltic Countries 2002, 43 percent of Latvian workers, 33 percent of Estonian workers, and 43 percent of Lithuanian workers considered work intensity to be too high (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

## **5. Mindfulness in the workplace: an innovative way to deal with work-related stress**

### **5.1 The value of mindfulness in the workplace**

Thinkers from various nations have long debated the value of mindfulness. Fundamentally concerned with “being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown & Ryan, 2003), mindfulness has been posited to help people become “alive” to the present moment (Hanh, 1976, p. 11), attuned to their internal processes and states (M. Epstein, 1995), and healthier, physically and mentally (Thondup, 1996).

Such mindfulness-related assertions were largely ignored outside of the realms of philosophy and religious studies until recently. Scientific viewpoints sometimes discount mindfulness as being too esoteric or "Zen-like" to warrant in-depth research. The misinterpretation of the term "mindfulness" may be a contributing factor in this dismissal. In the past, people have thought of mindfulness as a type of consciousness that may be developed by regular meditation (Conze, 1956). In keeping with this history, some modern methods for cultivating awareness, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), include meditation sessions as essential components of the curriculum.

Despite the researchers' growing interest in mindfulness, there is still some misunderstanding about what mindfulness is and is not. The question of whether mindfulness is sufficiently different from other concepts in the literature to warrant scholarly interest is raised by the fact that few academic attempts have been made to embed the mindfulness construct into a conceptual network that clarifies the nature of mindfulness by revealing not only its points of overlap but also its distinction from other attention-related constructs.

Additionally, little study has looked at whether mindfulness matters in the job. Particularly, there is a lack of study on how mindfulness influences how people carry out their job-related duties. This knowledge gap is not unexpected given that the majority of researches on mindfulness has taken place in fields that focus on health and wellbeing, like clinical psychology, rather than those that focus on performance-related behaviors, like management. This gap is regrettable. Mindfulness is relevant to the growing amount of academic research on how people concentrate their attention in organizations since it is an attention-related notion. Previous studies have shown that how organizational members pay attention impacts

their ability to make strategic decisions, consider risks, and recognize important resources at their disposal (Nadkarni & Barr, 2008; Bazerman & Watkins, 2004). (Weick, 1993).

However, little research has been done on how mindfulness affects these and other performance-related processes and outcomes. Simply put, there is a dearth of theory on whether and how mindfulness fosters or inhibits task performance in the workplace.

## **5.2 Meditation in the workplace**

A growing list of large firms like Google, Aetna, Intel, General Mills are among the many organizations that now offer mindfulness classes as a way to improve employee wellbeing and productivity (Schaufenbuel, 2015; Steward, 2015; LinkedIn, 2015). Various techniques can be used to develop mindfulness. Although mindfulness meditation is the most well-known method in western psychology (Good et al., 2016), there is evidence that mindfulness can be fostered in other contexts by paying more attention to novelty (Langer, 1992, 2014). While there are many different definitions of mindfulness, in western academic studies, it is frequently referred to as a condition of continuous attention to experiences occurring in the present (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Without interference, prejudice, or opposition, these events are viewed in their natural state. Additionally, some people may generally have a greater capacity to reach aware states than others if mindfulness is thought of as a feature (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

An increasing amount of studies connecting mindfulness to a variety of psychological and physiological consequences may explain why mindfulness has become so popular. Short mindfulness practices have been associated to improvements in subjective wellbeing and decreases in stress, negative emotions, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and chronic pain (Baer, 2003; Khoury et al., 2013; Good et al., 2016; Ngnoumen and Langer, 2016; Sanko et al., 2016). Also, a review of published academic research has confirmed the positive link between practicing mindfulness and workplace results, such as interpersonal relationships, employee performance and overall well-being (Good et al., 2016; Glomb, Duffy, Bono & Yang, 2011; Eby et al., 2019; Wolever et al., 2012). According to studies by Hölzel et al. (2011) and Fox et al. (2014), sustained mindfulness practice is correlated with structural alterations in brain regions relevant to executive attention and emotion control. But while encouraging research demonstrating the advantages of mindfulness in lab and clinical settings, surprisingly little is known about how these advantages can apply to more useful professional performance and behavior (Gallant, 2016). The majority of research has been done in

academic settings with samples made up of students or paid participants, which may have limited the generalizability of results to corporate working populations.

Although this has not yet been tested through a randomized and controlled experiment in a workplace setting, evidence suggests that the skills developed during meditation may be important in reducing biased thinking and increasing prosocial behavior (Kiken and Shook, 2011; Hopthrow et al., 2017; Oyler et al., 2021). This may be due to an increase in cognitive flexibility (Moore and Malinowski, 2009; Colzato et al., 2016). Particularly, mindfulness has been connected to decreases in sunk-cost decision-making bias (Hafenbrack et al., 2014), reductions in implicit age bias, and improvements in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB; Reb et al., 2015). The current study intends to determine whether these findings apply to a corporate working population in response to a need for more rigorous scientific exploration of the practical advantages of mindfulness meditation (Van Dam et al., 2017).

As stated in the previous section of this chapter, stress at work seems to be on the rise globally especially after the boom of Covid-19. Employees in fact experience day-by-day job strain and feel fatigue as a result of high job demands, long working hours, huge workloads, bad manager-employee interpersonal relationships. In order to cope with this situation, scholars and researchers are struggling to find solutions that eventually will decrease the levels of stress among workers and mindfulness appears to be one of the most innovative practices directed towards this common and widespread long-term work objective. According to some research, conducted by companies like Aetna, Google and Intel, the push for implementing mindfulness and its increasing practice at work can improve abilities such as focus, decision-making, thoughtfulness and overall well-being while decreasing stress levels. As a matter of fact, mindfulness, or being present in the “here and now” in a non-judgmental way, is a 21<sup>st</sup> century must-have skill but at the same time a centuries-old concept reinvented over and over to address the challenges of the digital age (Greiser, C., Martini, J.-P., & Meissner, N., 2018). It enables one to pause in the midst of a constant stream of stressors and consciously decide how to act, instead of reacting impulsively with ingrained patterns of behavior. As a result, mindfulness is well suited to counteracting the digital-age challenges of information overload and constant distraction. The advantages of mindfulness are obvious and well-documented. Mindfulness programs assist leaders and employees in effectively reflecting, focusing sharply on the assigned task, managing maximal levels of stress, and quickly recharging. Mindfulness reduces sick days, increases trust in leadership, and increases employee engagement at the organizational level. Furthermore, mindfulness supports in maximizing the potential of digital and agile transitions. These transformations are only

beginning with new processes and structures. It comes with no surprise the growing interest in mindfulness, especially amongst digital natives, but yet trying to integrate mindfulness in the workplace can be difficult. Some firms experience vocal skeptics, while others 're struggling with deeply embedded ways of working. Even leaders and employees who want to try mindfulness find it tough to get started. Companies must endorse a comprehensive approach to corporate agility in order to unlock the power of mindfulness. Mindfulness enables users to significantly improve their ability to respond quickly to changing circumstances and uncertain situations, as well as to learn new things more quickly. It fosters mental agility and encourages people to look inward for answers. Harvard psychologist, Daniel Goleman, and Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, therefore, provide scientific view of personal mindfulness benefits in their recent book, *Altered Traits*. They combine three proven mindfulness benefits that, when combined, allow individuals to perform more effectively in dynamic environments:

- **Stay calm and open-minded**

Mindfulness techniques, such as breathing meditation, have been linked to lower gray-matter density inside the amygdala, that part of the brain that activates a stress response. This lessens the tendency to perceive an ambiguous situation as a threat and thereby to respond defensively. Mindfulness improves mental agility in this way, enabling individuals to shift from ordinary to new approaches.

- **Cognitive ability**

Mindfulness enhances short-term memory as well as the ability to accomplish complex tasks. It also allows people to think creatively, which helps in trying to navigate complexity. Proven outcomes in the field of corporate performance include higher quality strategic choices and much more effective collaboration.

- **Focus and clarity of thinking**

"A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention," Nobel laureate Herbert A. Simon evidenced. This insight, first expressed in 1971, is more relevant today than ever. Maintaining a sharp focus today's age of digital information overload is therefore critical. Regular mindfulness practice can help to reduce mental wandering and attention deficits. Mindfulness increases awareness of one's current activities as well as one's mental processes and behaviors (known as meta-awareness).

Mindfulness increases the potential of corporate agility initiatives and agile transformations by providing these individual benefits. It enables people to adapt to changes in short cycles, relax so that established attitudes can be rewired, and think straight in the middle

of overwhelming digital stimuli. In a nutshell, mindfulness helps deal with uncertainty and ambiguity (Greiser, C., Martini, J.-P., & Meissner, N., 2018).

Nowadays, with the world changing at a fast pace, the ability to experience calmness and adapt to new situations is considered as a competitive advantage. Besides, a mindful workplace can be a powerful tool for recruiting objectives as increasing levels of mindfulness at work may increase commitment and engagement, reducing absenteeism and turnover. According to the Harvard Business Review, slowing down to focus on the present might indeed seem to be at odds with a business culture of speed and goal achievement. However, in today's fast-paced workplace, mindfulness practitioners understand the importance of reloading in order to restore creativity and productivity. Mindfulness, as a leadership strategy, assists people in being more efficient by directing their attention to the most important task given. Deprogramming multitasking tendencies and focusing with total attention leads to higher quality interactions as well as decisions. Mindful decision makers consider all the alternatives and, as a consequence, make better decisions. Managers who promote mindful practices with their teams foster an engaging environment. A number of well-known and recognized organizations have long realized the advantages of mindfulness (Schaufenbuel, K., 2015). The following section will present the programs one of these forward-thinking businesses is implementing and many more will be explained later in Chapter 5.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, by reducing stress levels companies are able to minimize employees' absenteeism, high turnovers, lowering healthcare costs, while at the same time boosting productivity and creativity. For this reason, stress reduction is the most broadly studied field of mindfulness in the workplace. Nevertheless "capitalist" aims and willingness of firms to achieve higher productivity should not be the only drivers of promoting stress reduction and thus mindfulness. Lowering stress levels in fact should be seen as an act of compassion for employees and a move of skillful leadership. Therefore, managers should care about people's emotional stability and well-being in order to promote a better working environment which will eventually lead to a more productive working context.

### **5.3 How to be a mindful leader: the case of AETNA**

With companies looking for new ways to enhance employee performance, mindfulness meditation is quickly becoming popular among many employees. Several studies have found that mindfulness improves concentration and productivity. As a result, many employers attest to its ability to reduce work-related stress, increase employee productivity and motivation while improving mental health. Companies like Apple, Salesforce and Nike for instance, are

offering meditation rooms in which employees can experience a quiet and calm environment and practice meditation or simply lay still and clear their minds for about ten minutes. This trend is not motivated solely by altruism as studies confirm that meditation improves creativity and critical thinking. According to the National Business Group on Health, meditation increases employees' productivity by 120%, businesses promoting mindfulness programs experienced a 520% profit increase, 60% of the workers who previously reported high levels of anxiety, showed great improvement upon practicing meditation, last, but not least, employers who implemented meditation programs in their companies witnessed a 85% decrease in absenteeism and that's probably one of the reasons why leaders offering meditation programs in the workplace increased by 16% from 2017 to 2018 moving from 36% up to 52% (Zuckerman, A., 2020).

Supporting evidence from AETNA, an American managed healthcare company selling traditional and consumer directed healthcare insurance and related services, showed remarkable results after the implementation of a mindfulness and yoga program within the company. The mindfulness program AETNA promoted started in 2007 after its CEO Mark Bertolini had difficulties to focus on work following a serious ski accident. Instead of turning to traditional medicine for medication he decided to practice meditation instead and the positive results experienced made him launch a pilot project based on mindfulness meditation which has now helped more than 15.000 employees. Bertolini came to realize that AETNA's workers were experiencing incredibly high levels of stress arising both from their work and private lives. Consequently, drawing on his own positive experience he felt responsible for helping his employees by providing them the tools and strategies he used to overcome his challenges and reduce stress. By doing so he adopted the new way of dealing with stress which is called "mind management" and consists of recognizing stress change and challenges has part of life and aiding individuals empower so that they become able to change the perspective and overall believes to deal with stress differently. When the program first started out employees were skeptical because they were saying that a company's aim is to make profit and not to boost collaboration and compassion but after preliminary search financial results were quite striking. AETNA, in the initial pilot program, gave workers freedom to choose between free yoga and mindfulness meditation training. After that they conducted a double-blind study to test the effectiveness of the two options and results were outstanding. In particular, there was a 28% drop in stress after the end of the program and employees increased their productivity of about 69 minutes per week. Moreover, a 20% improvement in sleep quality and 19% reduction in pain were registered. As we all may know stress affects



people ability to fight against illnesses and the more employees get ill in the workplace, the higher the costs a company has to bear in order to pay for their health, and so firms have interests in reducing employees' stress. As a result, AETNA by reducing stress levels by 28%, was also able to reduce healthcare costs of \$ 3.000 per person per year, thus increasing its ROI (return on investment). Given the fact that AETNA was quite successful in implementing mindfulness program its stock price multiplied by more than six times and the program also transformed its image into one of the most progressive company in North America thanks to the conscious approach Mark Bertolini adopted to run the business (Business & Beyond, 2018).

## **6. Mindfulness-based protocols**

The practice of mindfulness is essentially based on three elements:

- The growth of mindfulness: through methodical instruction involving both formal (sitting meditation, body scans, and yoga poses) and informal (fostering present-moment awareness throughout our daily routines) practice sessions.
- The development of a certain attitude toward experience, such as one that is open, friendly, curious, and accepting.
- The capacity to become aware of one's vulnerability without engaging in the defensive behaviors that frequently lead to psychic anguish (Segal et al, 2002).

The fundamental objective of mindfulness is to alter the subject's way of responding to his or her own thoughts rather than to change personal views or to educate the questioning of cognitive distortions (Baer, 2003).

For many years now, mindfulness techniques have been used in the professional setting to treat a variety of mental and psychological disorders, particularly those that are somewhat tied to stressful events.

John Kabat-Zinn developed the therapy known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which was put into practice at Boston University Hospital in the early 1970s. Kabat-Zinn was the first to recognize the value of incorporating traditional Buddhist meditation practices into a psycho-educational treatment accessible to everyone. The goal of his research is to create a new technique that can aid those with chronic pain conditions. The body of theoretical mindfulness principles and practices are then updated to reflect the existential issues of contemporary society by recontextualizing them, adapting them to a group program, and incorporating new psychological approaches and understanding.

There are currently roughly four formal mindfulness-based methodologies that have been, at least in part, supported by empirical research. They are mostly organized around the practice of meditation, with elements occasionally included that are taken from the theories and methods of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:

- **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)** which was first thought by American Professor and psychologist Marsha Linehan who intended to use it for the treatment of borderline personality disorder.
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)** which assumes that mental suffering has among its causes the avoidance of the experience, thereby stimulating patients to reduce emotional control and develop an attitude of acceptance toward what they are experiencing. It was advanced by Steven C. Hayes, Professor of the faculty of psychology at the University of Nevada, in 1986 (Fiore, F., 2017).
- **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**: this protocol was originally developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn for the treatment of chronic pain and stress-derived disorders; in such situations, participants should learn to label their feelings and emotions by naming them, instead of avoiding them.
- **Mindfulness Based-Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)** which consists of an adaptation of the MBSR protocol integrated with some Cognitive Behavioral Therapy techniques, with the aim of preventing depressive relapse.

The fundamental tenet of the afore-mentioned therapies is that acceptance of one's own situation "as it is" leads to the resolution of inner conflicts, which can be the source of anxiety, depression, and a wide range of symptoms related to stressful situations. This attitude can be learned by instructing the mind to view itself as a simple observer of one's own internal processes rather than as an instrument for continuous monitoring.

Thus, participants gain the ability to view their ideas as mental processes that are changeable, immaterial, and fleeting. This practice and related knowledge should reduce stress and enhance emotional self-regulation (Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007).

### **6.1 Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)**

A cognitive behavioral therapy designed expressly for borderline personality disorder is dialectic behavioral therapy (D.B.T.). Already in the 90s several controlled clinical trials (Linehan, Armstrong, Suarez, Allmon, Heard, 1991; Linehan, Heard Armstrong, 1993) and also more recent studies (Carter, Willcox, Lewin, Conrad, Bendit, 2010; Lineha, Comtois,

Murray, Brown, Gallop, et al. 2006) have identified dialectical behavioral therapy as the first proven to be effective for borderline personality disorders, also and above all in its most serious self-injurious and parasuicidal forms. Co-therapy, which is a close interaction between individual psychotherapy and a kind of skills training that typically occurs in groups, is the therapy style that has proven to be effective in this sense (Linehan, 2011).

A dialectical worldview serves as the foundation for dialectical behavioral therapy, or DBT. Multiple facets of the nature of human reality and behavior are supported by the dialectical perspective.

The first feature of dialectics is the underlying unity and interdependence of reality, which implies that the study of a system's individual components is constrained if it does not take into account the particular situational situations in which both individual and group behavior are represented.

The idea that reality is not static but rather consists of conflicting internal forces (thesis and antithesis) that are constantly changing and whose synthesis results in the creation of new tension between those forces is the second aspect. In this perspective, borderline patients' extreme and dichotomous thought patterns and dysfunctional behavior are viewed as dialectical failures: the patient is unable to progress dynamically toward a synthesis because they are caught between extreme polarities.

The third characteristic of the dialectical perspective is the presumption that reality is built on change and that both the self and the environment are subject to change on a continuous basis. Therapy therefore aims to foster the capacity to manage change rather than to maintain a stable condition in a stable and cohesive environment.

The set of dysfunctional behaviors that borderline personality disorder patients exhibit, including suicidal and parasuicidal behaviors as well as impulsive and dysfunctional behaviors that have an impact on a variety of contexts and situations, are addressed by DBT. Examples of these include the traditional behaviors of self-harm, promiscuous sexuality, drug or alcohol misuse, dysregulated eating habits, risky conduct for their life, excessive rage, and aggressive activities in interpersonal relationships together with a number of other impulsive actions that might be detrimental to a person in the medium and long run. In this respect, the objective is to build and generalize a different toolbox of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses in order to lessen behavioral discontrol.

The ultimate goal of DBT is to improve the patient's quality of life so that, in the words of Marsha Linehan, the model's creator, "a life experience worthy of being lived". This is achieved through improvements in the management of such highly dysfunctional behaviors,

in emotional regulation, and through the validation of the significant suffering that frequently accompanies people with borderline disorder (Carter, Willcox, Lewin, Conrad, Bendit, 2010). DBT is based on the same shared definition of specific treatment aims with the patient as traditional cognitive behavioral therapy treatment protocols, seeking to develop a collaborative partnership and mutual commitment in accomplishing the goals of therapy. The development and maintenance of a relationship between patient and therapist, in which the patient's thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors are fundamentally validated, is emphasized during the entire course of treatment.

Coterapia is the main kind of treatment, in which various therapeutic actors collaborate to achieve a common objective. A network of therapy is formed by the individual therapist, group skills training therapists, and occasionally the psychiatrist so that the patient develops relationships with various reference figures who serve diverse purposes in the treatment environment. A 50-minute psychotherapy session and an hour-and-a-half to two-hour group skills training session are typically included of the concept. There are also potential deviations from this approach, such as when selecting individualized skill development for certain clinical objectives.

The dialectical behavioral therapy approach makes use of a number of techniques that are actually part of cognitive-behavioral therapy, including exposure, behavioral analysis, problem-solving, and many different types of skill-training.

Similar to the treatment, there are unique components compared to conventional cognitive behavioral therapy. First and foremost, mindfulness training is given special attention, and DBT is recognized as a "third wave" therapy for this reason. A share of acceptance and validation of contingent behavior is fundamental in a difficult balancing game of change and acceptance, which is also reflected in the use of therapeutic techniques and strategies. This is why dialectical behavioral therapy goes by the same name: it places a greater emphasis on the dialectical aspects. Third, dialectical behavioral therapy includes prioritizing treatment in sessions and paying organized attention to behaviors that are deemed to interfere with treatment (Linehan, Armstrong, Suarez, Allmon, Heard, 1991).

Because persons with borderline personality disorder lack the capacity to regulate their emotions, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions or struggle to do so in many experiential circumstances, skills training is crucial in behavioral dialectic therapy. As was already mentioned above, this would lead to a dysregulation and instability that is manifested on various levels, namely the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, relational, and identity levels.

As envisioned by dialectic-behavioral therapy, the skills-training entails the organization of four modules of learning and appropriation of particular skills that are meant to improve the emotional disorganization, cognitive, behavioral, relational, and identity characteristics typical of borderline disorder.

- The first module refers to nuclear mindfulness skills ("awareness");
- A second module addresses the skills of emotional adjustment, which are fundamental in the framework of borderline operation;
- A third module covers interpersonal effectiveness skills focusing on learning effective strategies to manage interpersonal relationships;
- A fourth module refers to the tolerance skills of mental suffering and anguish, useful when the subject is in a state of dysregulation not only emotional but above all behavioral.

It is important to emphasize that dialectical behavioral therapy is effective for borderline personality disorder when it allows for the association between individual therapy and group skills training therapy to the extent that it is impossible to participate in a group skills training without also undergoing individual psychotherapy with the same orientation.

## **6.2 Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

The ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) is a psychological and psychotherapeutic intervention developed within a coherent theoretical and philosophical framework based on experimental evidence, they use mindfulness and acceptance strategies together with action engagement and behavior modification strategies to increase psychological flexibility (Hayes, 2005).

The word "psychological flexibility" refers to the ability to be completely present in the moment as a conscious human being and, depending on the circumstances, to change or maintain behaviors that further the values that each person has determined to be important.

The ACT's goal is to assist the person in making an effective decision (concrete actions consistent with their values) in the face of challenging or disruptive private situations.

A core theory of language and cognition, an application theory of psychopathology, and a theory of psychological change are all embraced by the ACT.

Psychological issues might result from a negative or overly rigid internal discourse.

People are cognitively "connected" with their own story, or they are identified with their own thoughts, according to the ACT, meaning they are profoundly affected by this internal dialogue and are not entirely aware of such training.

The ACT's core tenet is that the interface of language, thought, and the control of direct experience over conduct typically results in psychological distress.

The ACT asserts that trying to alter ideas and feelings that cause problems is a counterproductive style of coping and creates new and effective alternatives. It does this by citing the relational frame theory (Relational Frame Theory). These include commitment to action, values, mindfulness, acceptance, and cognitive dissonance. Sheds light on the ways that language traps people in fruitless battles with their inner selves.

The ACT calls for a fundamental shift in perspective, a transformation in how one views one's own life experiences.

The techniques employed attempt to alter the fundamental nature of psychological issues and the effects they have on life while offering fresh approaches for coping with them.

The three fundamental tenets of the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy are as follows:

- **Mindfulness:** is a technique for self-observation that has been used in various forms of meditation for ages in the East. Practice of mindfulness can have significant psychological advantages, according to recent Western psychology study (Hayes, Follette, & Linehan, 2004). These methods teach people to look at their own suffering instead of viewing the world through it; they can see that there are many other things to accomplish right now in addition to attempting to control their own psychological contents.
- **Acceptance:** it is founded on the idea that, typically, attempting to escape from one's own misery simply makes it worse, traps one farther inside of it, and turns the experience into something terrible. The ACT clearly distinguishes between suffering and pain. Human language is designed for problem-solving, so when a challenge arises, people naturally want to know how to approach it. The ability to deal with unfavorable circumstances (such as predators, cold, and floods) has always been crucial for human survival; but, attempting to apply the same mental order to one's own interior sensations is unsuccessful. In actuality, you typically manage and handle a painful internal event so that it no longer exists by the time you come across it. Internal experiences, however, are not the same as exterior events, and attempts to eradicate them do not succeed in reality. If we perceive that we are moving in the direction we want for our existence, accepting what life implies means giving up all

attempts at a pointless solution and accepting what life entails rather than being passive, resigned, tolerating, or enduring.

- **Commitment and life based on values:** when battling psychological issues, it's common to put your life on hold because you think your pain must subside before you can start living again. The ACT challenges you to step outside of your head and into your life by acting in accordance with your principles.

The goal of ACT and mindfulness therapy is to help you get more familiar with anxiety and its physical symptoms in order to reduce your anxiety-related fear and reestablish a healthier relationship with alarm feelings.

This familiarization has a connection to the phenomena known as defusion, which is the acceptance of one's thoughts and emotions as such. The vicious cycle is halted in this manner, and ironically, anxiety actually declines.

The ACT also seeks to decrease avoidance and encourage progressive participation in activities that are crucial to people's lives.

The interaction between cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance in relation to psychological discomfort has not yet been empirically studied in existing literature, despite the rational theorist ACT's argument that they are two interconnected psychologically rigid processes that affect emotional suffering and psychopathology.

### **6.3 Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, meditation can permanently alter stress and suffering. Thus, the idea of mindfulness, which is the inquiring and non-judgmental attention to the present moment. In terms of awareness and acceptance of the current moment, it is a process where you draw attention to it.

By developing a profound awareness and acceptance of whatever occurs through active work with one's mental processes, mindfulness seeks to end needless suffering. Due to this profound understanding of states and mental processes, practicing mindfulness enables you to transition from a state of imbalance and suffering to one in which you have a stronger subjective impression of well-being.

Therefore, according to Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness should be easily adaptable to different medical situations and accessible to patients' psychological and physical needs. For this, it needed restrictions on time, mobility, and space that were tailored to the realities of a hospital.

Based on these requirements, mindfulness techniques were developed that opened up the prospect of using them to treat challenging patients. Mindfulness activities were stripped of their spiritual and moral overtones (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

During a meditation retreat, Jon Kabat-Zinn had the idea that by developing a systematic path that linked the Mindfulness approach with scientific and psychoeducational elements, he could aid individuals in reducing pain and stress.

He established the first clinic for stress reduction based on the cultivation of consciousness in 1979 with the help of the department of Internal Medicine at the Medical Center of the University of Worcester, Boston, Massachusetts (Kabat-Zinn, J., & University of Massachusetts Medical Center/Worcester, 1990).

The Kabat-Zinn MBSR program consists of the following components:

- Mindfulness practices in eating
- Mindfulness practices on the move
- Mindfulness practices on breath, sensations, emotions, thoughts
- Mindfulness practices in walking

There are also opportunities for group discussion about how the exercises were received by the participants. These discussions include reflections on topics like nonjudgmental attention, the beginner's mind, letting go and letting be, and self-confidence, as well as lecture notes and insights on more scientific issues like stress and attention.

The Kabat-Zinn team started working on the first research project in the early 1980s, initially focusing on the protocols' applicability to patients with chronic pain before extending the research to other fields like psychosomatic illness and psychology. On the MBSR protocol, Kabat-Zinn wrote his first book, "Living moment by moment," in 1990. A few years later, the journalist Bill Moyers discusses MBSR in his television program "Healing and the Mind," which contributes to raising awareness of the protocol. In the meantime, the protocol has been spreading like wildfire thanks to studies and research published with scientific rigor, but especially thanks to testimonies.

In the 90s, more than 400 hospital centers offered MBSR, so much so that the scientific and psychotherapeutic world began to become more and more interested in the program, thinking about applying it to different problems. This will then be the basis of many collaborations and exchanges with the Boston University Center, which will then give rise, later, to the MBCT protocol, more psychological matrix (Kabat-Zinn, J., 2003).



#### **6.4 Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)**

Due to the popularity of mindfulness-based stress reduction, there is now some interest in using mindfulness techniques as a treatment aid even in the field of cognitive science. In actuality, both mindfulness and cognitivism were interested in how our ideas affect our emotions and behaviors.

Among the interventions derived from Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy is the most widely used and scientifically tested Protocol.

A subject who has previously experienced depression runs the risk of relapsing into depression because, in times of low mood, tends to automatically reactivate thoughts, emotions, and sensations that were active during the period of suffering, according to Segal, Teasdale, and Williams (2006), the authors of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. In light of this, the main objective of the mindfulness-based cognitive therapy program is to assist patients in achieving a fundamental alteration in their connection with ideas, emotions, and physical sensations that may trigger depressive relapses (Segal et al., 2013, p. 80). In other words, the goal is to help patients develop a new relationship with their bodies and their experiences so they can step back from automatic reactions and avoid the vicious cycles that increase the likelihood of relapse.

The wider form of thought known as the "fare" can be linked back to the ruminative thought that sets off vicious cycles. The technique of doing it frequently yields amazing outcomes as an approach to solve problems and accomplish objectives in the outer world, as stated by Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn (2007). Problems arise when the manner of doing things is applied to self-related matters; in these circumstances, the impulse to act actually entails ongoing result monitoring. The mind keeps repeating these assessments because it is very difficult to narrow the gap between reality and what is desired in a short amount of time. This causes the mind to ruminate, which in turn causes depressive relapses. When the mind follows the need to act, it loses touch with the moment; when it attempts to solve a problem, it drifts away from the answer because it is unable to recognize the signs that the body delivers. You can use these chances as an opportunity to exercise because this way of thinking is a frequent response to the emotions you encounter every day. The idea of mindfulness encourages experimentation with the mode of being, which is not a singular state in which all activity stops but rather a decentralized perspective that frees us from the automatic and involuntary responses that are usually our default settings and work to suppress the pleasant and ward off the unpleasant. Similar to the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program,

Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy encourages a specific use of attention and awareness, indicating a focus on cognitive processes rather than content. The goal is not to rid the mind of all unpleasant states, but rather to keep them from becoming stable when they do.

The authors recommend Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy to a group of patients, typically thirty, because practicing with others and talking about personal experiences is seen as a key component of the strategy. The weekly meetings last around two hours and alternate between practice sessions and times for reflection on what has been encountered (Inquiry). Participants are encouraged to complete activities between meetings at home, some of which come with audio recordings. During the classes and at home, there is an alternating pattern of formal and casual practice. Similar to the mindfulness-based stress reduction program, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is an intervention method, or training path, rather than psychotherapy. However, there is a primary distinction between the two: while mindfulness-based stress reduction is a transdiagnostic protocol, involving participants with a variety of medical and psychopathological conditions as well as individuals without a specific diagnosis who feel stressed or want to make a change in their way of life, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is a program specifically designed for patients with major depressive disorder.

There are certain distinctions because of the connection between Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy and cognitive therapy, even though the structure and contents are 90% comparable to the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (Girommi, 2014). You can immediately tell that there are some moments and some theoretical insights in the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy program that are absent from Kabat-program Zinn's if you look at the agenda for the first eight meetings.

The decision to conduct an initial interview with the patient, the insights on the theme of depression, as well as the program's orientation to action are all clear indications of the cognitive horizon into which it is inserted (for example, participants are invited to identify actions that reassure or give them pleasure and to implement them if there are negative feelings or emotions).

On a more general level, it seems reasonable to say that Crane (2009) that the main contributions of cognitive theory in the development of this tool include a theoretical framework related to the issue of spillover vulnerability, a hypothesis on the influence of mindfulness in these processes, although to some extent made explicit in the work with patients, and a strong link with empirical verifiability.

## **Chapter 3 – Neoliberalism and mindfulness**

### **1. An overview on Neoliberalism**

Even though the term “neoliberalism” is most often used to refer to contemporary liberal doctrine, there is almost no analysis of the historical circumstances that led to its rise. With “neoliberalism” scholars and experts describe the ultraliberalism seen within France and also in most Western nations since the late 1970s. Aside from when studying a rejuvenation of liberalism in political life as well as state practices, the issue of the necessarily problematic novelty linked with the "neo" prefix is rarely raised. As a result, contemporary liberalism is paradoxically poorly understood and analyzed with no regard for its history. The lack of research is with no doubts due to the term's political meaning and polysemy: literature on neoliberalism is indeed split into two interpretations. The first is a moderate form of liberalism that acknowledges some government interventions, as witnessed in France's postwar economic policy (Kuisel 1984; 224 and 410-448). The second is a critical examination of all forms of state intervention, which during the 1970s and 1980s largely depended on supply theories or monetarism, as evident in the theories which led to European and American deregulation (Théret; Perrineau 1994: 313-334). These two definitions of neoliberalism highlight the ambiguity of a term that is both a historical category born at a specific historical moment and a modern concept. Nonetheless, the two definitions are intertwined. Contrary to popular belief, neoliberalism emerged during the 1930s and not right after World War II. In fact, the very first attempt to theorize the concept was made at the Walter Lippmann Conference held in Paris in August 1938 (The Lippmann Conference 1939) which was organized by Louis Rougier (Lyon, 1889), the son of a doctor who qualified in 1914 as a philosophy teacher. The aims of the Conference were to coordinate international actions against the fashionable "planned economy" of the time (Noyelle 1934; Amoyal 1974; Biard 1985), as well as to establish a "neoliberalism" that would eventually leave space for state interventions in the economy. This meeting led to establishment of the Centre International d'Études pour la Rénovation du Libéralisme (CIRL: the International Center of Studies for the Renovation of Liberalism) which served as a model for the Mont Pelerin Society, a scholarly society and influence network, which every year since 1947 has brought together partisans of neoliberalism (Cockett 1994: 57).

Saad-Filho and Johnston, co-authors of the book “Neoliberalism – a critical reader” affirm that we are now living in the age of neoliberalism (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005:1).

According to them and to other authors of the book as well, power and wealth are increasingly concentrated within transnational corporations and elite groups as a direct consequence of the practical implementation of a political and economic ideology known as “neoliberalism”. It is difficult to trace the moment in which neoliberalism first emerged in history, but its principles date back to the classical liberalism Adam Smith was standing up for and specifically, to the understanding of man and society on which he founds all his economic theories (Clarke, 2005). In this perspective, neoliberalism on one side embodies a new “paradigm” for economic theories and policy-making, while on the other it is a revival of Smith and his heirs’ 19<sup>th</sup> century economic theories. Palley (2005) expands on this point, claiming that a “great reversal” has occurred, with neoliberalism replacing the economic ideas of John Maynard Keynes (1936) and his disciples. Between 1945 and 1970, Keynesianism was the dominant theoretical framework in economics and economic policy-making, but it was later replaced by a more “monetarist” approach inspired by Milton Friedman’s theories and research (1962; Friedman and Schwartz 1963). Since then, we have been led to believe that “neoliberalism,” — for example monetarism and related theories, has been dominant in macroeconomic policy-making, as demonstrated by a trend toward less stringent state regulations on the economy and a bigger emphasis on economic stability rather than “Keynesian” objectives such as full employment and poverty alleviation. Munck also advanced that the possibility of a “self-regulating market” constitutes a central assumption in classical liberalism and consequently a core presumption among neoliberals (Munck, 2005). The main mission of an economic system is the efficient allocation of resources, and the most efficient way to allocate resources is that through market mechanisms, by what Munck refers to as “neoliberal economic theories.” Government intervention in the economy is thus most often disadvantageous, because intervention can undermine the highly tuned logic of the marketplace, reducing economic efficiency. “Neoliberalism – A critical reader” represents a modern stream of critical literature which aims to denounce neoliberalism (Blomgren 1997; Bourdieu 1998; 1998a; 2001; Giddens 1998; Chomsky 1999; Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Touraine 2001; Rapley 2004; Harvey 2005; Hagen 2006; Plehwe et al. 2006). Many of the cited works give neoliberalism an overwhelming meaning while also seeming perfectly content to leave the concept of “neoliberalism” totally undefined, claiming, like Saad-Filho and Johnston, that it challenges definition. One could easily come to think that the concept has become a generic term to describe almost any economic and political development deemed undesirable.

Even though the recent streams of literature assert that neoliberalism is a new phenomenon, nonetheless the term appeared in some old articles published at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Oxford English Dictionary 1989a). In particular, the concept of “neoliberalism” first came out in an article by Charles Gide (1898; 1922), a famous French economist and leader of the cooperative movement. Gide foreshadows later usage of the term in his piece, which is primarily a criticism against the “neoliberal” Italian economist Maffeo Pantaleoni (1898), where neoliberalism is widely considered as a return to the classical liberal economic theories advanced by Adam Smith and his followers. However, few authors used Gide's concept after him, and its application is inconsistent, as different authors emphasize different aspects of liberalism when referring to more recent contributions to liberal theory as “neoliberal” (Barnes 1921; Burns 1930; Merriam 1938). The doctoral thesis “Le néo-libéralisme et la revision du libéralisme” by Jacques Cros is the first book-length work discovered which employs the term “neoliberalism” in its title (Cros 1950). According to Cros, neoliberalism is the political ideology resulting from the few efforts political theorists such as Wilhelm Röpke (1944; 1945) and Friedrich von Hayek have made in order to revitalize classical liberalism in the period immediately preceding and during World War II (1944; Hayek et al. 1935). Cros' main point is that these "neoliberals" have sought to redefine liberalism by adopting a more right-wing or laissez-faire attitude on economic policy matters, as opposed to the modern, egalitarian liberalism promoted by Beveridge and Keynes. Cros generally applauds these "neoliberals" for standing out against totalitarianism when few others did, particularly among intellectuals. He remains skeptical though of their central thesis, which is shared by most classical liberals, according to which individual liberty is dependent on a free-market economy in which the state has chosen to give up its power to regulate the economy for the sake of society as a whole or the interests of its own citizens. Following Cros, the term "neoliberalism" is used only seldomly, and then primarily to refer to the situation in Germany, where it was occasionally utilized as an epithet for the ideology underlying West Germany's "social market economy" (soziale Marktwirtschaft), for which some of so-called "ordo-liberals" like Röpke served as central inspirations (Arndt 1954; Friedrich 1955). In particular, the German social theorist and Catholic theologian Edgar Nawroth (1961; 1962) attempts, based in part on Cros, to center his analyses of the Federal Republic's political and economic developments on the concept of Neoliberalismus. In Nawroth's studies, neoliberalism is defined as the attempts of the first two West German Chancellors, Konrad Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard, to merge a market economy with liberal democracy and some elements of "Catholic social teachings" (katholische Soziallehre), and as a "middle alternative" between

fascism and communism. However, Nawroth remains extremely sceptical of this rather eclectic ideology, and he is particularly concerned that the free market economy inspires people to become capitalistic and self-centered, thereby impeding their moral development and weakening German society's internal unity. Thus, Nawroth critiquing West German "neoliberalism" paves the way for a new tradition in which the term is used with a depreciative meaning. Cros and Nawroth's principle of neoliberalism was gradually transferred to the rest of the world, where it gained popularity in the 1990s. The early stages of this movement can be seen in an article by Wilfried ver Eecke, a Belgian-American philosopher (1982), which is an implicit attempt to export Cros and Nawroth's concept of neoliberalism to the English-speaking world. Ver Eecke employs the term neoliberalism in his text to describe both German ordo-liberalism and American monetarism, both of which express a clear preference for a state that holds the right to intervene in market dynamics only to protect the market economy as such, such as through the implementation of anti-trust laws and monetary policies solely primarily directed at price stability. In comparison to Cros and Nawroth's expositions, we observe the concept of neoliberalism at a more stable stage in his article. According to ver Eecke, neoliberalism does not describe any recent contribution to liberal theory, instead it is a concept reserved for a specific type of liberalism characterized by a radical dedication to laissez-faire economic policies. Many are and have been the scholars who have tried to give the concept of neoliberalism a wide-ranging definition, amongst these we can find David Harvey, a British Marxist economic geographer who, in his "A brief history of Neoliberalism", provides a definition of the principle building upon Cros, ver Eecke and Nawroth's works (Harvey 2005). According to Harvey in fact, "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and

because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit” (Harvey 2005:2). It could be argued that Harvey's proposed definition of neoliberalism expresses the firm belief that the world has undergone “an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s” (ibid.). Harvey suggests that neoliberalism should be viewed as a distinct economic theory that has recently replaced a more mild-mannered “embedded liberalism”. Harvey clearly understands neoliberalism as a separate entity from mainstream liberal policies and values rather than as a continuation of liberalism "proper." In fact, reality demonstrates that some neoliberals aren't liberals at all, as Harvey includes anti-liberal autocrats like the Former Leader of the People's Republic of China, Deng Xiaoping and the Chilean General and Leader Augusto Pinochet among some of the political vanguard of neoliberalism. In Harvey's view of our recent history, political theorists and economists including Hayek and Friedman appear frequently along with principally conservative politicians like Reagan and Thatcher as being largely liable for all things neoliberal. By giving neoliberalism a definition that encompasses everything going from Thatcherism to “socialism with Chinese traits and features”, Harvey wants to underline that neoliberalism is not, as many might think, a “complete” political ideology, but rather “a theory of political economic practices”. Anna-Maria Blomgren also tries to study neoliberalism, this time from the standpoint of normative political theory (1997). In a "critical analysis" of Friedman, Nozick, and Hayek's political thought, she summarizes their respective political and economic theories as "neoliberal political philosophy." Blomgren's basic characterizations of neoliberalism overlap with Harvey's definition to a large extent, and yet still emphasize the internal diversity of neoliberal thought: “Neoliberalism is commonly thought of as a political philosophy giving priority to individual freedom and the right to private property. It is not, however, the simple and homogeneous philosophy it might appear to be. It ranges over a wide expanse in regard to ethical foundations as well as to normative conclusions. At the one end of the line is “anarcho-liberalism”, arguing for a complete *laissez-faire*, and the abolishment of all government. At the other end is “classical liberalism”, demanding a government with functions exceeding those of the so-called night-watchman state” (Blomgren 1997:224). According to Blomgren, Hayek, Friedman, and Nozick all provide distinct theoretical foundations for neoliberal assessments and policies. On the surface, Friedman is a representative of consequentialist neoliberalism: he appears to favor neoliberal policies such as deregulation, privatization, and radical tax reductions because of the perceived positive effects such political actions will have on the general state of the economy. When Blomgren

investigates further, she discovers that his policy proposals are based largely on a conception of natural law. This means that Friedman ultimately wants to implement the neoliberal "bundle" of economic and political practices because human beings are social by nature, and their social nature dictates a certain method for organizing society that places a high value on equality and freedom of choice (Friedman 1962; 1980). On a slightly different note, Hayek appears to represent a more conservative kind of neoliberal, who, whilst still approximating a utilitarian argument in favor of neoliberalism at times, ultimately builds his political ideas on an idea of natural law. Hayek's theory is based on the concept of a "spontaneous order" of social life, which is superior to any artificially imposed order in terms of ensuring individual freedom and well-being (Hayek 1944; 1973). At last, Nozick, at least in his earlier works on political philosophy, offers a perfect representation of a deontological type of neoliberalism: He endorses many of the same policies as Friedman and Hayek, but based on the idea that all human beings have been endowed with a set of unchanging natural rights, and that these rights make it difficult to see the state as having any legitimate role to play at all (Nozick 1974). Nonetheless, Nozick wants governments to make amends for past errors, even if that means the government would have to intervene quite frequently in the economy. Differently from Friedman and Hayek, Nozick does not make reference to the ostensibly positive consequences of neoliberal policies when arguing for them, but instead focuses upon those policies being the right measures for establishing a society consistent with his understanding of justice and natural rights. These distinctions between various types of neoliberalism are clearly problematic. Other interpretations, such as giving Friedman and Hayek's political thought an indirect utilitarian grounding rather than the type foundation in natural law conceived by Blomgren (Malnes 1998; Lundström 1998), could be made. Her final question, however, is quite obvious in her overall analysis: Is it relevant to view neoliberalism as a coherent and consistent body of political thought, provided the widely divergent theoretical justifications for the same set of policies in circulation? Perhaps it's better to regard neoliberalism as a convenient description for an amorphous set of political theories rather than as a distinct political philosophy. Such theories range from Rothbard's "anarcho-capitalism," which retains that the state should be abolished entirely, to Mises and Hayek's "classical liberalism," which holds that a strong but majorly inactive commonwealth together with individual and commercial freedom are necessary preconditions for social life. At times, these various political ideologies advocate for a radical "roll-back of the state" and the establishment of a society primarily ruled by market mechanisms. They are, however, different enough to justify a more nuanced criticism that acknowledges their internal



differences rather than lumping them all together under the label of neoliberalism. Building upon the above-mentioned numerous attempts to define neoliberalism, Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie have come to define neoliberalism as a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights (Mises 1962; Nozick 1974; Hayek 1979). This conviction usually results in a belief that the state's strength and size should be minimized, if not drastically reduced, and that any deviation from the state's 's principal legitimate purpose is inappropriate (ibid.). Those same beliefs could apply to the international level as well, where a free market and free trade system should be implemented; the sole acceptable reason for controlling international trade is to protect the same kind of commercial liberty and strong property rights that should be realized on a national level (Norberg 2001; Friedman 2006). In general, neoliberalism holds that freely adopted market mechanisms are the best way to organize all exchanges of goods and services (Friedman 1962; 1980; Norberg 2001). It is believed that free markets and free trade will liberate the creative potential and entrepreneurial spirit that are built into the spontaneous order of any human society, resulting in greater individual liberty and well-being along with a more efficient allocation of resources (Hayek 1973; Rothbard [1962/1970] 2004). Neoliberalism may also include a moral virtue perspective: the good and virtuous person is the one who can access relevant markets and operate as a qualified actor in these markets. He or she is ready to take the risks that come with free market participation and to adjust to the rapid changes that arise from such involvement (Friedman 1980). Individuals are also seen as solely responsible for the consequences of their freely made choices and decisions: instances of inequality and obvious social injustice are morally acceptable, at least to the extent that they can be regarded as the consequence of freely made decisions (Nozick 1974; Hayek 1976). If a person demands that the state regulate the market or compensate the unfortunate who has been on the losing side of a freely initiated market transaction, this is taken to mean that the person concerned is morally depraved and underdeveloped and not dissimilar to a supporter of a totalitarian regime (Mises 1962). When understood and defined in this way, neoliberalism becomes a weak set of ideas about how the state's relationship with its external environment should be organized, rather than a comprehensive political ideology (Blomgren 1997; Malnes 1998). In essence, it is not understood in any way as a theory on how political processes should be organized. For example, Neoliberalism is silent on the question of whether democracy and free flow of political ideas are desirable. As Harvey (2005) points out, policies inspired by neoliberalism

can be implemented both under the auspices of autocrats and within liberal democracies. In reality, neoliberals simply argue that as much as possible should indeed be left to the market or even other processes in which people freely choose to participate, and as a result, as little as possible should be made subject to genuinely political processes. Proponents of neoliberalism are thus frequently portrayed as skeptics of democracy in the "critical literature": if the democratic process slows down neoliberal reforms or threatens individual and commercial liberty, as it sometimes does, then democracy should be avoided and replaced by the rule of experts or legal instruments designed for that purpose. As a result of the practical implementation of neoliberal policies, power will shift from political to economic processes, from the state to markets and individuals, and from the legislature and executive authorities to the judiciary (Østerud et al. 2003; Trollstøl and Stensrud 2005; Tranøy 2006).

## **2. Mindfulness under Neoliberal governmentality**

The main focus of my dissertation until now has been the importance of mindfulness, with particular attention to the benefits and effects corporate mindfulness or mindfulness in the workplace entails. But despite this, in order to understand deeply and have a general overview about the phenomenon herein analyzed, it should be noted that streams of critique have raised doubts on the effectiveness of corporate mindfulness. In particular, according to Zack Walsh, author of the article "Mindfulness under neoliberal governmentality: critiquing the operation of biopower in corporate mindfulness and constructing queer alternatives", the way mindfulness has been rethought in order to produce neoliberal subjects, thus promoting neoliberal governmentality is at the center of several mindfulness critiques. Most of the latter do not assert that teaching mindfulness in a corporate environment is a problem in and of itself, however, they do critique the broader definition of the corporate mindfulness phenomenon when it is used as a tool whose various entanglements with neoliberal governmentality cause mindfulness practitioners to be subordinated to larger systemic issues that are related to how stress is caused and how mindfulness is employed as a cure to alleviate the symptoms arising from stress as a consequence, rather than being used in order to manage the systemic sources of stress (Walsh 2018). To proceed in our analysis, we have to take a step back to Michael Foucault's definition of biopower, which is a new form of power exerting control over "the capacities and aptitudes of individual bodies... and enhances the quality of the population as an efficient economic resource" (Cheah 2010, p. 186). Biopower governs life processes by managing them within the context of value and utility (Foucault

2010, p. 262, 266). As claimed by Foucault, biopower would be the solution to the changing nature of capitalism whose main problem nowadays is how to “function without an outside it can colonize and appropriate” (Fisher 2009, p. 8). Corporate mindfulness's growing popularity is partly fueled by its capability to enable as well as extend biopower. Mindfulness is frequently used to extend biopower through programs designed around each of these discourses, while also working in tandem with decentralized forms of disciplinary power in institutions such as the military, schools, prisons, and hospitals. Corporate mindfulness is thus defined broadly to include both the use of mindfulness in corporations, but also mindfulness programs implemented in other institutional settings. The welfare state's duty to ensure wellbeing is outsourced to the individual under neoliberal governmentality, who must instead guarantee their wellbeing by trying to align themselves with the corporate logics frequently embedded within these various institutional bodies (Walsh 2018). In his “The Happiness Industry”, Professor Will Davies states “Wellbeing provides the policy paradigm by which mind and body can be assessed as economic resources” (2011, p. 65) demonstrating how the maintenance of life processes by biopower is more and more centered on the management of individual stress and the creation of happiness (Davies 2015). Likewise, Swedish academic Carl Cederström and New Zealand academic and Professor André Spicer in “The Wellness Syndrome” illustrate the multiple ways in which, under neoliberal governmentality, the body is transformed into an enterprise that requires careful monitoring and optimization to maximize returns (Cederström, Spicer 2015, p. 105). Such studies validate Alenka Zupančič's thesis according to which biopower has evolved into biomorality, with a moral imperative to be happy and healthy (Zupančič 2008, p. 5). Happiness and well-being are no longer results of a well-lived life, instead they are now produced, extracted and at last, exchanged as economic resources. While the moral directive to be happy and healthy provides as the normative foundation for biopower, self-help practices such as mindfulness represent regulatory mechanisms through which biopower handles life processes. Mindfulness techniques are likely to have gained mainstream popularity because they allow individuals to privately manage their stress and wellbeing at little or no cost to state or corporate bodies, thereby expanding the reach of biopower. The overwhelming privatization of stress coupled with the significantly increasing mental distress rates since the beginning of neoliberalism is driving the high demand for mindfulness (Fisher 2009, p. 19, 32). There is an enormous mismatch between health problems arising from work-related stress and the amount of resources countries invest in order to solve those issues. To support this statement, depression will become the biggest health burden on society within 2030 based on the World Health

Organization projections (2008, p. 51), yet the majority of countries spend less than 1% of their total health budget to mental health (Saxena et al., 2003). This increases the demand for what Larisa Honey (2014) refers to as "technologies of the self" which create subjects who "view themselves as responsible for their own social welfare and wellbeing." Such self-help technologies, such as mindfulness, are evidently prominent at a time when neoliberalism operates by imposing austerity measures that reduce or eliminate critical social services. In the end, well-being and mindfulness happen to share a fidelity to neoliberal governmentality, inasmuch as well-being is a resource, and mindfulness serves as a tool to increase its value and utility. The fact that happiness and well-being are regarded as economic resources and that mindfulness represents the right tool for enhancing their value is supported by David Gelles' claims, who, in his "Mindful work" states that "Mindfulness can be a source of employer value proposition and may in the long run provide organizations with a valuable tool to manage high burnout levels of employees." (Gelles 2015, p. 97). Thus, mindfulness evidently enables and extends biopower when institutions invest in it as a means to handle our mental constitution. Moreover, mindfulness is also employed to enhance employee engagement with companies aiming to increase and maximize revenues, thus organizations have capitalist objectives and seem to care little about employees' health and mental stability. As demonstrated by the Gallup Report of 2020 described in Chapter 2, workplaces around the world are undergoing a worsening crisis of engagement and meaning related to rising rates of absenteeism, presenteeism and illness (Gallup 2020). Therefore, disengagement costs are increasing year by year. In order to recover such costs, managers have increasingly appealed to mindfulness-based and well-being interventions to ameliorate their ability to control and manage employee engagement (Walsh 2018). Instead of implying a genuine concern for the well-being of employees, however, such techniques demonstrate how biopower and disciplinary power collaborate to casualize employees as expendable resources (no interest in employees' healthcare, only capitalist interests). Mindfulness is frequently used as a technology disciplining oneself to fully comply with underlying market rationalities and corporate logics in such competitive and precarious work environments. Based on what health and safety advisor at the UCU college and university lecturers' union John Bamford told Labor Research (Anon 2015), "resilience has arisen as part of an 'unholy trinity,' alongside wellbeing and engagement. 'Add mindfulness and you've got the four horsemen of the apocalypse as far as any real employer approach to removing the causes of stress-related illness goes.'" Mindfulness discourses and programs aimed at improving well-being, resilience, and engagement prove how corporate mindfulness serves as a regulatory

mechanism for biopower to contain and monitor people's inner lives as an economic resource. Technocratic applications of corporate mindfulness together with the operation of biopower in corporate mindfulness are not confined to the workplace, but instead exist across different institutional contexts (Walsh 2018). In all the above-mentioned cases, biopower works by regulating and distributing power around norms, which are internalized by people trying to be more successful under neoliberal governmentality. In fact, as Foucault once said, “A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life.” (Foucault 2010, p. 266). It has been proven, in particular by some religious studies scholars such as Jeff Wilson (2014), Richard King (2005) and Jeremy Carrette conducted, that once removed from its original context and transferred to the Western world, mindfulness has undergone a process of recontextualization in the West’s corporatist and consumerist society. Biopower is effective specifically because it enrolls subjects in the production of its own power, and mindfulness, is perhaps effective because it yields neoliberal subjects. Mindfulness has indeed been shaped in the West by an atomizing, individualistic mindset nestled within a cultural, social, and political context wherein stress is viewed as a failure of the individual. By observing the experience of post-Soviet Moscow, Professor in the Anthropology Department at Queens College Larisa Honey (2014) found out that the so-called “technologies of the self” such as mindfulness give birth to neoliberal subjects “characterized by depoliticization, rejection of institutions of social welfare, and stigmatization of individual misfortune”. Furthermore, she discovered self-help practices of neoliberal nature were characterized by “the centrality of the self in the attainment of wellbeing, practices of self-realization and self-control, and the sale of practices and ideas of the self in the marketplace”. To a certain extent, mindfulness extends neoliberal governmentality through practices of responsabilization, that refers to “the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another – usually a state agency – or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all” (Wakefield and Fleming, 2009). As David Gelles advocates, when mindfulness supporters affirm that “Stress isn’t something imposed on us. It’s something we impose on ourselves.”, they make people responsible for their own well-being (Gelles 2015, p.85). Corporate mindfulness programs, such as Google's Search Inside Yourself, generate neoliberal subjects, with the fundamental assumption that individuals are really the locus of responsibility and change. Mindfulness, when performed in this context, expands biopower by directing attention inward, placing the sources of stress and suffering in our reactions to social and material conditions instead of situating them in the conditions themselves. As

argued by Ronald E. Purser, author of the book “McMindfulness: how mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality” and Professor of Management at San Francisco State University, “corporate mindfulness trainers are constrained by their dependency under corporate sponsors to ensure that such programs do avoid disruption of social harmony.” (Purser 2014), thus through corporate mindfulness individuals are thought to engage with their thoughts in different ways, divert strong feelings and reduce stress with the purpose that they maintain the inner resources they are in need of in order to meet the constantly increasing demands. Corporate mindfulness also polices attention and prevents the development of an increasingly critical, political awareness. In this perspective, it works in the same way that sociologists like Marx, Freud, and later critical theorists saw spiritual and religious practices as opiates or safety valves that alleviate stress without motivating and encouraging political responses to injustice. When employees have to face conditions of increasing demands or precariousness, for example, corporate mindfulness encourages practitioners to favor adaptation and adjustment strategies, allowing them to perform better in the world instead of trying to work to change it. In other words, mindfulness in this sense, transforms individuals into passive human beings, who, acting like puppets, are overwhelmed by change rather than leading it. Critical theorists such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze recognized that "external surveillance is succeeded by internal policing" under neoliberal governmentality (Fisher 2009, p. 22). Corporate mindfulness generates neoliberal subjects not just by internal regulation, compliance, and individual accountability, but also by tacitly embracing a neoliberal political ontology. Secular mindfulness aims to teach practitioners to observe precarious and fractured relationships as reflections of the basic essence of reality, which is fluid and continuously changing, by growing "non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness" and strengthening the doctrines of impermanence (Cederström and Spicer 2015, p. 25). Moment-to-moment consciousness thus occupies a vacant, zero-point time—a universal perspective from nowhere; whereas nurturing non-judgmental awareness privileges the present and the immediate, without taking into account how time is socially produced and mediated. It captures abstract, ephemeral moments of time referred to as postmodern temporality's vertiginous continuous present by Frederic Jameson that are always present but cannot be found (Fisher 2009, p. 58). Secular mindfulness hypostatizes the tension and dynamism of neoliberal capitalism by ignoring the ways in which experience is socially mediated and produced, relieving stress while furthering the causes and conditions that produced it. Despite some exceptions (Walsh 2017), mindfulness practices fail to develop a critical awareness of the social, political, and ecological variables that lead to suffering, as

well as the historically contingent power structures. Dominant mindfulness discussions that provide psychological, biological, and neurological explanations rather than humanities or social science interpretations also strengthen the belief that individuals are the locus of responsibility and change. These discourses and practices, when combined, give rise to a neoliberal subject who, for the most part, acknowledges the dominant social order with no questioning. "By modulating attention in such a way, the conditions of our neoliberal political economic situation are left unquestioned and accepted as inevitable," notes Edwin Ng (2015). Mindfulness successfully produces subjects who adhere to the capitalist realism dictum (There Is No Alternative!), while attempting to prevent the advent of a more critical, but more courageous political subjectivity. This has been the primary target of the growing backlash against secular mindfulness (Walsh 2016a). Critics question the current mindfulness conceptualizations and practices' hegemonic dominance in producing neoliberal subjects, while creating opportunities for the development of more critical, socially and politically aware alternatives. Many critics are motivated by the implicit premise that discourses and practices should be democratized, that contemplation may serve as a mechanism for social transformation, and that critiques provide an excellent platform for co-determining what alternatives might emerge. Thus, critiques clarify the practical and discursive effects of corporate mindfulness in order to give a contribution to the larger collective task of interpreting and trying to adapt mindfulness in new ways. If the primary objective is that of liberating people from the systemic oppression that practitioners face as a consequence of capitalism, then mindfulness practices must be part of an ecology of praxis for pushing the limits of capitalism while resisting its violence and excesses. As long as it remains otherwise preoccupied, it simply avoids the issue critics have raised, failing to deal with the structural conditioning of stress (Walsh 2018). Sadly, mindfulness proponents who respond to critiques frequently deny their own involvement and blame structural injustices on something or someone beyond the critique. People who personalize critiques of mindfulness in fact, often doubt the authority of critics by defending their own personal reputation and integrity and by adopting systemic behaviors considered problematic by critics. In such cases, it is the critique of mindfulness itself that becomes its antithesis, and critics now become the problems they pose. Apologists frequently frame criticisms as unfounded expressions of critics' frustration by blaming them for raising the issue. By making those who witness injustice the problem, injustice doesn't become the problem, critics do, as if critics who identify a problem do so because they feel angry, rather than being angry due to their legitimate concerns. In this sense, critics are not thought to expose problems, instead they are regarded as those who create

problems. As the father of secular mindfulness interventions, Jon Kabat-Zinn reacts to criticisms in such a way that is typical of such denial. In some of the articles he has written including "Mindfulness has huge health potential - but McMIndfulness is no panacea," he turns criticism against itself, validating just those aspects that confirm previous biases while rejecting others that do not. In his article, Kabat-Zinn seemed to be unaware of the concept of McMIndfulness (2015), however, later, after having heard Jeff Wilson's lecture (2015) "Mindfulness Inc." he claimed it was the first time he had learned and realized the broad commercialization of this phenomenon. On the one side, it's incredible that Kabat-Zinn was previously unaware of the predominance of McMIndfulness, considering how his work has helped to create a huge industry of mindfulness-based programs and self-help books; on the other side, it's comprehensible, provided how his relative privilege enables him to easily forget the unintended effects of his work. Those who benefit from structural advantages are usually unaware of them, thus major mindfulness proponents who delegitimize critiques because they have not experienced the challenges they bring up are unable to comprehend and respond to the systemic nature of critiques and the facets in which they reflect marginalized experiences (Walsh 2018). Even after having to confront the actual fact that mindfulness had been commodified, Kabat-Zinn concluded that it had the ability to withstand any misappropriation, given its intrinsic nature as an element of the universal Dharma—a response that refutes critics' repeated assertions that such faith-based statements about mindfulness are not universal, but instead cause unintended damage (Ng *et al.* forthcoming). It is irresponsible to deny the substance of critiques because one does not understand the issues they raise. The term McMIndfulness offends many mindfulness theorists, including Kabat-Zinn, who wield the unearned structural affordances of corporate mindfulness. Apologists frequently use what Elaine Swan (2010) refers to as "technologies of displacement," which prevent critiques from becoming validated upon their own terms. However, "responding to a critique necessitates not making reference to what is said or written back to oneself but engaging with what is asserted" (Ahmed 2012, 150). The problem is that by making well-being an individual duty, economic and political systems empower and broaden themselves, why calling off their responsibility and receding into the background. Mindfulness programs, on a parallel track, extend and empower neoliberalism by improving practitioners' ability to withstand stress, while, at the same time, preventing practitioners from becoming "mindful" or, in other words aware, of the causes and conditions that contributed to it in the first place. From a phenomenological point of view, biopower "functions as a background, as that which is behind actions that are repeated over time and with force, and that insofar as



it is behind does not come into view” (Ahmed 2006, p. 87). No matter the individual mindfulness practitioner's personal goodwill, one cannot be framed within the exploitative rationales and structures of neoliberal governmentality, due to their being key to mindfulness's success. The efforts of mindfulness practitioners to provide relief and protection must thus be accompanied by continuous questioning of the form of development which has stood to benefit mindfulness (Cheah 2010, p. 206). Even so, assessing how mindfulness could be displayed in less consumerist, more conscientious ways, the critique of mindfulness is not complete. Mindfulness criticism is therefore limited in that it only reveals what is controversial about a subset of practices that are as of now intertwined with neoliberal governmentality, hence it does not mirror the potential mindfulness could have if transplanted in different social and cultural contexts. Supporting evidence coming from Joanna Cook's "Mindful in Westminster" demonstrates that the wide range of experiences people have had approaching mindfulness, challenges the totalizing influence of neoliberalism (Cook 2016). Further studies, like the one conducted by Edwin Ng affirm that mindfulness should be experimented as an ethico-political practice going beyond the boundaries of neoliberal governmentality (Edwin Ng 2016). He investigates on how ethical self-cultivation and vipassan meditation can "defuse normative modes of subjectivity and catalyze transformative un-becoming processes." Such neoliberal contestations and efforts to retranslate mindfulness are good starting points for reorienting mindfulness. According to Walsh, these attempts could be advanced in a non-normative, situational ethic of response-ability to *#makerefuge* (Walsh 2018) which is explained in depth in the discussion of orientation in *Queer Phenomenology* by Sara Ahmed. Based on her discourses, the rule of law determining "what forms lives must take in order to count as lives 'worth living.'" is overthrown by queer phenomenology (Ahmed 2006, p. 84). It consists of a plausible basis for reorienting mindfulness around a non-normative, situational ethic of response-ability, as it encourages people to be in favor of lives that do deviate from norms, it pushes people to be brave and disorients them aiming to make the familiar strange. This allows for "an opening up of what counts as a life worth living" (p. 178), supporting "those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place" (p. 179). In this sense, queer phenomenology is a provocation, asking what our reaction will be to deviation rather than demanding that we create something queer or become queer ourselves (p. 179). It encourages people to reorient themselves so that they do not exclude histories and people from their consciousness. Commitment to resilience, engagement and wellbeing in mindfulness practice consistently orients practitioners' bodies and their minds in ways that extend biopower. Practitioners orient

mindfulness around daily maintenance rather than awareness of collective suffering by bolstering those commitments through repeated practice, and they sink into routines of mindfulness that allow biopower's inner workings to recede from their view. "Forgetting becomes an adaptive strategy in these conditions of ontological precarity," states Mark Fisher (2009, p. 56). It permits people to keep adapting and adjusting to the dynamism of neoliberalism. Queering mindfulness to #makerefuge, on the contrary, refuses to let the problematic aspects of our practice fade away, because it puts mindful awareness to the relative privilege that allows people to forget. In secular Western contexts, the translation of mindfulness (Pali, sati) as "non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness" downplays the ethical, social, and historical roots of sati as a discipline of collective recollection. The implicit neoliberal political ontology of mindfulness praises the immediate present while ignoring the many ways in which it is socially and historically mediated. The present inherits a past and guides practitioners toward a future, but this fact is often overlooked in the midst of rhetorical claims that mindfulness is a universal human capacity or the essence of the universal Dharma. By queering mindfulness to #makerefuge, practitioners can recall (sati) neglected histories of systemic violence, which inform the ongoing legacies of social and environmental injustice; they can also refocus on collective well-being by developing new habits and conditions to support the excluded and marginalized, not just as victims of ongoing violence, but as individuals whose well-being is representative of their own. Queering mindfulness to #makerefuge thereby accomplishes the work of recalling and being responsive for those negatively affected by biopower operations in mindfulness programs that look at inner resources as economic resources. It fosters an open-minded, situational awareness that does not simply search within oneself, but draws attention to the mutually constitutive inner- and outer-dimensions of one's becoming in regard to a multifaceted political and social ecology of other subjects. It enables us to become-with the world-in-becoming by dissolving the neoliberal governmentality's false private/public and personal/political distinctions. Rethinking mindfulness around such a response-ability ethic presumes that mindfulness has historically been political. Counterclaims are politically inspired tries to depoliticize mindfulness, which effectively continues to serve biopower. The rhetorical claims on mindfulness being apolitical effectively dismiss socially engaged efforts to retranslate mindfulness for political and social activism. This way, apologists try to avoid facing the reality that all human activity, which would include mindfulness practice, is political. Whether one admits it or not, politics invariably shapes mindfulness, and at these historical roots, it really is capitalist-driven politics. Theorists of corporate mindfulness do not argue

that mindfulness is a tool for social change, and they accept neither responsibility nor authority to affect the policies that shape mindfulness. To be responsive, mindfulness proponents must consider the unintended consequences of corporate mindfulness and reimagine mindfulness practices in a more critical, politically and socially aware context (Walsh 2018). Even though mindfulness has not traditionally been used as a tool for social change, there are some precedents (Walsh 2016b). Now comes the question of how we might need to change the practices themselves in order to meet the need for increased political engagement. One possible solution is to bring mindfulness to #makerefuge. This type of practice does not seek to cultivate happiness. Instead, it is about radical honesty and fearlessness—probing the conditions of happiness or unhappiness, sitting in discomfort and leaning into it as a way to free multitudes of beings from the affliction of suffering. Capitalism, which thrives off successive crises, would rather create the problem and sell the cure than recognize how both are mutually constitutive of one another. To respond effectively to the systemic problems described in mindfulness critiques, one must practice mindfulness in order to explore the systemic situations of suffering and reorient oneself in harmony with whoever or whatever suffers. This type of practice employs mindfulness to attend to the suffering of current history's forgotten and dispossessed victims—to #makerefuge. Through reorienting oneself around solidarity with others, one can break the never-ending cycle of suffering's systemic causal factors. Hence envisioned, mindfulness practice does not adhere to a neoliberal political ontology of atomized individuals trying to compete for safety and well-being; rather, it adheres to a process ontology of subjects-in-relation, or, as Thomas Berry put it, a communion of subjects mutually supportive of flourishing-in-difference. As overwork pushes the demand for further economization of personal resources, corporate mindfulness and biopower are closely interrelated, enabling and extending one another. However, if we are all preoccupied with just being well individually, we will be not well together. Individual-focused mindfulness programs can actually undermine justice in some cases by blinding us to power imbalances and structural realities. Work overload fades into the background of the practitioner's awareness in individually focused mindfulness programs. If mindfulness were redesigned around the more general task of #makingrefuge, the ongoing privatization of wellbeing by neoliberalism would be redefined around the need to provide cultures and communities of wellbeing. Rather than remaining resilient in the face of increasing stress, mindfulness would be refocused on obtaining workplace justice as a prerequisite for safety and wellbeing. In contrast to David Gelles' claim that stress is self-inflicted, a Stanford study found that the majority of stress is caused by factors such as work overload, high job demands,

workplace unfairness, and job insecurity (Lynch 2015). Response-able corporate mindfulness programs would not only help employees reduce stress but would also foster cultures of wellbeing supported by company structures and policies that promote it. Queering mindfulness to #makerefuge would be positioned within the political context of reform as long as such conditions are not present.

#makingrefuge not only withstands biopower, but also reorients mindfulness around redistributive and regenerative political economies—commons-based systems that socialize wellbeing and knowledge, share wealth, and reorganize life around social-ecological flourishing. Mindfulness practices have the potential to deny the kind of strict opposition between capitalism and anti-capitalism; however, for that potential to be achieved, mindfulness practices would need to be enacted outside of the dominant psychotherapeutic frames, which operationally define and perform mindfulness in ways that grant the instrumental ends (e.g., wellbeing, resilience, engagement) an authority beyond the meditative experience, as wild as and unforeseeable as that may be. Even if corporate and employee interests do not always have to be in conflict, mindfulness would need to be reshaped as a socially engaged practice to convert these simple oppositions into more complex harmonies. Sadly, people bound by the imperatives of capitalist realism are likely to refuse any such larger vision of what mindfulness can do. They will continue to view stress as a personal problem, ignoring mindfulness' ability to engage politics and attend to systemic conditions of safety and wellbeing. There are also a number of structural factors that are impeding the development of socially engaged alternatives to mindfulness. Nonetheless, there is the possibility of using mindfulness as an introspective practice. Paulo Freire defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" in his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (2000, p. 51). Queering mindfulness to #makerefuge offers one approach to practicing mindfulness in religious and secular contexts—one based on the non-normative, situational ethic of response-ability that generates subjects oriented toward justice (Walsh 2018). In the end and from my personal point of view, the biggest contradiction of all arises from the fact that organizations, following the attitude of capitalism itself, ask individuals, and, more specifically, their employees, to participate in mindfulness programs to cope with and decrease stress when firms are the ones causing stress in the first place as it has been scientifically proven that stress is a condition of perceived burden provoked by excessive work overload, long working hours, high job demands. Hence, instead of sourcing the problem and then finding the solution to it as the logics behind capitalism suggest, companies should make structural changes and rethink work activities as not to put workers in

circumstances that ultimately can cause harm. Therefore, organizations should first understand the nature of the problem, and then, immediately solve it in order not to wait until employees' strain becomes unbearable, so rather than acting afterwards, they should move beforehand. Generally, critiques on McMindfulness challenge the tendency of mindfulness to serve neoliberalism. Ron Purser and David Loy's co-authored Huffington Post article (2013) under the title "Beyond McMindfulness" might be the most broadly circulated critique to date. It received particular acknowledgements and recognition thanks to its critique of the way neoliberal ideology shapes mindfulness. Therein it contests that corporate mindfulness "conveniently shifts the burden onto the individual employee: stress is framed as a personal problem, and mindfulness is offered as just the right medicine to help employees work more efficiently and calmly within toxic environments" (Para. 14). This line of critique is shared and envisioned by the American Theravada Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, born Jeffrey Block and Slovenian philosopher, cultural theorist and intellectual Slavoj Žižek in that they perceive mindfulness is becoming the perfect ideological supplement to capitalism (Eaton 2013; Žižek 2001). From year 2013 onwards, there is been a growing number of publications critiquing how mindfulness is used as a tool to alleviate symptoms of stress, yet with no effort in trying instead to address the problem of how stress is caused by social systems and environmental issues. In fact, a blog post published on the Contemplative Pedagogy Network affirms that mindfulness blames the individual for suffering and encourages psychological adjustment, "instead of addressing the external cause of stress" (Barratt 2015, para. 1).

### **3. "*McMindfulness*": mindfulness as the new capitalist spirituality**

Corporate mindfulness training programs have grown in popularity over the last decade with companies like Google, Goldman Sachs, Ford Motor Company, Aetna, and General Foods that have trained managers and employees in mindfulness-based stress reduction activities. The evangelical promotion of mindfulness as a panacea for all that troubles us has given way to a backlash, with questions being raised regarding whether its arguments for finding happiness, well-being, and career success have been overstated (Purser, 2018). Miles Neale, a Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist, coined the expression "McMindfulness" to describe "a feeding frenzy of spiritual practices that provide immediate nutrition but no long-term sustenance." (Purser, 2019). The modern mindfulness mania is the entrepreneurial equivalent of McDonald's. Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, started the fast food industry. Kroc recognized and realized very soon the franchising potential of a chain of restaurants in San

Bernadino, California, while selling milkshakes. He agreed to act as the McDonald brothers' franchising agent. Fairly shortly after, he bought them out and expanded the chain turning it into a global powerhouse. During a retreat, Kabat-Zinn, a devoted meditator, realized he could have adapted Buddhist practices and teachings to help hospital patients deal with stress and physical strain. Kroc saw an opportunity to give busy Americans instant access to food that would be consistently delivered through automated processes, standardization, and discipline. Kabat-Zinn similarly saw a chance to provide stressed-out Americans with easy access to MBSR programs through an eight-week stress-reduction mindfulness class taught by using a standardized curriculum. Teachers of MBSR would be certified through programs at Kabat-Center Zinn's for Mindfulness in Worcester, Massachusetts. He continued to broaden MBSR's reach by identifying institutions like the government, schools and corporations as new markets to invest in as well as legitimizing other forms of "mindfulness-based interventions." Mindfulness has indeed been reduced to a practice that can be utilized for almost any purpose and in almost any context. Thus, it has certainly been oversold, commercialized and commodified. Mindfulness' commodification keeps it anchored in the ethos of the market, devoid of a moral compass or ethical commitments, and unmoored from a vision of the social good (Purser R., 2019). This is due, in part, to mindfulness proponents' belief that the practice is apolitical, and thus the avoidance of moral inquiry and the unwillingness to take into account a vision of the social good are entangled. An assumption is made on that ethical behavior will emerge "naturally" from practice and the instructor's "embodiment" of soft-spoken niceness. But even so, the claim that "paying attention to the present moment, non-judgmentally" will bring about significant ethical changes is clearly false as the emphasis on "non-judgmental awareness" can easily severely impact one's moral intelligence. As it has been discussed by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King in their "Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion", Asian wisdom traditions have been exposed to colonization and commodification ever since 18th century, generating a highly individualistic spirituality perfectly suited to dominant cultural values and requiring no meaningful change in lifestyle. Individualistic spirituality is definitely connected with the neoliberal privatization agenda, especially when hidden behind the ambiguous language of mindfulness (Carrette; King 2005). Market pressures are already capitalizing on the mindfulness movement's momentum, reorienting its objectives toward a narrowly defined individual realm. According to Carrette and King, mindfulness is reduced to "pacifying feelings of anxiety and disquiet at the individual level, rather than seeking to challenge the social, political, and economic inequalities that cause such distress." (Carrette; King 2005). Notwithstanding, a commitment

to this type of privatized and psychologized mindfulness is political - therapeutically optimizing individuals to make them "mentally fit," attentive, and resilient so that they can continue to function and to be productive within the system. Such surrender appears to be the furthest thing from a revolution, more akin to a quietist capitulation. Mindfulness is established as a force capable of assisting us in dealing with the toxic and harmful influences of capitalism. However, because what it provides is so easily absorbed by the market, the potential for social and political transformation it can have is neutered. Based upon what leaders of the mindfulness movement believe, capitalism and spirituality can coexist, as they do evidently, but mindfulness proponents rhetorically want a mindfulness that will ameliorate stress, but without having to look deeper and wider at its political, economic, and social causes. A revolutionary mindfulness would question the Western sense of entitlement to happiness, regardless of ethical behavior. Mindfulness programs, on the other hand, do not require executives to evaluate how their decisions and corporate policies have institutionalized greed, ill will, and delusion. Instead, executives are being sold the practice as a way to decrease stress, enhance productivity, boost performance and improve focus, and recover from 80-hour working weeks. They may be "meditating," but it works similarly to taking aspirin for a headache. When the pain subsides, it's back to business as usual and nothing has changed, therefore it is a short-term remedy to a long-term lasting problem. Even if individuals become nicer, the corporate agenda of profit maximization still remains unchanged. If mindfulness only helps people find a way to deal with the toxic circumstances that prompt them to be stressed in the first place, we might be able to aim a little higher. Should we rejoice that this perversion allows people to "auto-exploit" themselves? This is the heart of the problem. Internalization of focus for mindfulness practice leads to internalization of other things, ranging from corporate requirements to social dominance structures. What's worse is that this submissive position is presented to people as freedom. As a matter of fact, mindfulness thrives on freedom doublespeak, celebrating self-centered "freedoms" while ignoring civic responsibility or the development of a collective kind or form of mindfulness that sees genuine freedom within a cooperative and just society. For sure, it is much easier to sell stress reduction, increased personal happiness and well-being than serious issues of injustice, inequity, and environmental devastation. The latter involve a social order challenge, whereas the former directly address mindfulness's priorities amongst which we find sharpening people's attention, enhancing their work performances. Mindfulness has been reimagined as a new psychotherapy technique, but its utility has also been marketed as self-help. This branding reinforces the idea that spiritual practices are truly a private thing. When

these practices are privatized, they are quickly co-opted for social, economic, and political control. Instead of being employed to awaken individuals and organizations to the unwholesome roots of selfishness, ill will, and delusion, mindfulness is frequently reshaped into a clichéd, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually strengthen those roots (Purser, 2019). As the McMindfulness critique evolves, new investigations are being conducted to investigate how mindfulness programs are affected by neoliberalism - a regime of truth that reinforces what Julie Wilson refers to as “disimagination” thereby weakening our powers of discernment, critique, and radical thinking (Wilson 2018, p.51). Unfortunately, many proponents of corporate mindfulness programs, particularly those with a financial interest in selling and marketing them, have ignored the content of these critiques, frequently misrepresenting the main concerns. Leading figures in the mindfulness movement have decided to ignore the way neoliberal forces have shaped and subverted a practice that was intended to liberate humans from the delusion of being a distinct self. The contemporary mindfulness movement's celebration of individual freedom, authenticity, and the primacy of the individual as the only moral agent and source of authority exemplifies this propensity to downplay and minimize the social, political, and economic dimensions. The sovereignty of independent individuals who can explore the complexities of late capitalist society by governing themselves becoming self-regulating and self-compassionate, and choosing their own welfare, well-being, and security is emphasized in neoliberal mindfulness. Corporate mindfulness has ended up becoming the new capitalist spirituality, an organized but myopic and shortsighted self-help doctrine that shifts both the risk and the responsibility for well-being onto the individual. Thus, individuals become vulnerable as they are forced to regularly control and self-regulate their thoughts and feelings and "destructive emotions" by "being mindful." One that is autonomous, independent and free to make rational decisions that help to increase human capital with the unique responsibility of its own happiness and well-being is defined as neoliberal self. Stress is on the rise inside organizations. That is not something to deny or argue about. As reported by a Gallup study in fact, lack of “employee engagement” causes nearly \$550 billion in losses (Sorenson and Garman 2013). Corporate mindfulness initiatives are now being promoted and marketed as a remedy to the employee disengagement crisis. However, among corporate mindfulness advocates, questions about the systemic sources of mis-commitment are rarely raised. Individual-level mindfulness training becomes the solution and selling point by accepting a biomedical explanation for the factors that cause stress. This effectively depoliticizes stress by pathologizing and psychologizing it, thereby placing the burden on individual employees to adjust to the existing material and structural



circumstances that led to disengagement in the first place. The privatization and medicalization of stress is a new phenomenon which emerged only in the 1950s, after the publication of endocrinologist Hans Selye's book *The Stress of Life* (Selye 1978). Stress has now taken over the public imagination by becoming a cultural concept; Dana Becker has compared stress to the “New Black Death” (Becker 2013). She (2013, 18) came up with the term “stressism” to describe the common belief that the pressures of modern life are “primarily individual lifestyle problems to be solved through stress management.”

#### **4. The concept of “economizing the self” and the individualistic character of mindfulness**

Mindfulness is identified as a technique of self-actualization or self-enhancement, a procedure of self-care and self-management, a method of acquiring self-knowledge, a system of self-calculation, and a way of self-expression or self-liberation in its practical application. Mindfulness implies a specific relationship to the self as a process of investment, often directed toward competing or heterogeneous ends. The self-to-self relationship provides a point of contact for government techniques or to what Michel Foucault describes as “the exercise of power,” which is a method for controlling the behavior of others by conducting oneself (Foucault, 1982). As stated in the previous paragraphs of this chapter, neoliberalism influences not only institutions such as the State, government, schools, the military, but it also alters and infiltrates the creation of culture, knowledge and the production of individual subjects shaping everyday life based on the “veridiction” of the market (Foucault, 1978/79). Thus, neoliberalism is a rationality that generates a world and a way of living that world and being in the world; as argued by Wendy Brown “Neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains and activities - even where money is not an issue - and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*.” (Brown, 2015). As a consequence, it is important to understand to what extent this model of the market together with the *homo oeconomicus* inspires mindfulness as a discipline adopted by both individuals and companies that ultimately fosters the neoliberal project of economizing cultural, social, political and subjective life. Because of the neoliberal logics standing behind mindfulness and because of the relationship to the self as an object of transformation this practice instantiates, mindfulness helps produce neoliberal subjects who can be governed through and for the perpetuation of a neoliberal market order. There is an ongoing relationship between mindfulness and neoliberalism, and, in this perspective,

mindfulness practices might mirror and actualize neoliberal norms of subjectivity and social organization. The use of mindfulness across all the institutional contexts in which it is employed demonstrates mindfulness's versatility as a term apparently applicable to all aspects of one's life. Also, due to its breadth it is difficult to provide a single, specific definition. It is commonly described by referring to the words of Jon Kabat-Zinn, the leading figure of mindfulness in American culture, who defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) He now describes it simply as "active or purposeful self-awareness." (Kabat-Zinn, 2017) The focus on mindfulness as an action performed on oneself implies that it is more than just a representation of the self; it is in fact an active construction of the self through the deliberate mediation of attention and nonjudgment. In this sense, the categorization of self-construction-through-mediation defines mindfulness as a therapeutic technology of subjectification. Therapeutics consists of, "a heterogeneous array of techniques of subjectification through which human beings are urged and incited to become ethical beings, to define and regulate themselves according to a moral code, to establish precepts for conducting or judging their lives, to reject or accept moral goals." (Rose, 1998) as stated by the social theorist Nikolas Rose. While the ethical and moral dimensions of therapeutics suggest an incompatibility with neoliberal rationality—which replaces normative moral, ethical, and political claims with the higher objective, and amoral wisdom of market veridiction—the therapeutic mode of subjectification found in mindfulness practices is a prime example of neoliberalization inasmuch as it offers a site of subject economization and depoliticization, thus representing a way of transforming ethical and moral claims into market norms and values. This neoliberalization of mindfulness provides a nominally ethical framework for individual self-realization that conflates or encompasses therapeutic ethics within neoliberal market logic. This means that no alternate kinds of psychological therapeutics guided by a self-contained or transcendent ethics devoid of economic or political values exist. According to Rose, "psy-disciplines", namely the therapeutic field of psychological sciences, is composed of "complex emotional, interpersonal, and organizational techniques by which the practices of everyday life can be organized according to the ethic of autonomous selfhood" (Rose, 17). A technology of subjectification, a mode of constructing and governing the self that is "profoundly subjectifying because [it] appears[s] to emanate from our individual desires to fulfill ourselves in our everyday lives, to craft our personalities, to discover who we really are." is what he understands as therapeutics of psychology (Rose, 17). By turning externally focused forms of self-realization inward toward personal transformation based on

existential awareness and speculative well-being, mindfulness offers a unique valence of psychological therapeutics that expands the ethic of autonomous selfhood and self-crafting. Mindfulness-based therapy starts from the “understanding that much of what we think, feel and do is the consequence of unconscious, ‘implicit’ processes. The task of therapy, then, is to *access* implicit, automatic, dysfunctional thought patters...[mindfulness-based psychotherapy is] a ‘technology of access.’” (Germer, 2005). Mindfulness can be used as a tool to access processes of cognition and intervene on them through intentional experience, meditation and non-judgmental action in order to achieve a more holistic sense of self that hides underneath the subject’s behavior. The self-realization that mindfulness provides when combined with neoliberal rationality becomes a means for depoliticizing subjects who are forced to constantly shape themselves in accordance with their individuality and personal freedom as well as an avenue for economizing the self as an object of speculative investment. In all of our thinking, we are governed by rules that we are not aware of, according to Hayek's view of human behavior (Hayek, 2014). In all of our thinking, we are governed by rules that we are not aware of, according to Hayek's view of human behavior. The unconscious and implicit laws that regulate human cognition and action, in contrast to what affirmed in the Hayekian schema, are accessible and offer a path to therapeutic self-realization. In support of the neoliberal economic theory and practice, this technology of access and self-realization provides a sort of self-governance that is beneficial to societal economic governance. In order to consider mindfulness not only as a mere description of the human subject resembling partially the neoliberal subjectivity, but also as a practice that provides a technology of subjectification that may extend and foster the project of neoliberal governance, it is useful to look at the ways in which mindfulness can help in the individualization and depoliticization of subjects who are central to neoliberalism’s world-making project. Mindfulness aids in the individualization and depoliticization of subjects:

- Through a self-actualization that denies instrumental and therefore political ends;
- Through an emphasis on non-judgement and individual experience that can supplant political action;
- As a mode of redirecting the external objects of desire inward toward an investment in self-care and self- enhancement, mindfulness risks substituting individual transformation for collective political transformation.

The guiding premise of mindfulness is "letting things be and allowing them to unfold in their own manner." (Kabat-Zinn) In order to inculcate an awareness of reflexive individual responses to external stimuli, mindfulness engages at the level of the automatic order of

events that constitute cognitive processes. This provides a framework for one's relationship to oneself. The temporal accent on "slowing down" and "being in the now" in meditation, though, is supposed to foster a direct relationship with experience instead of approaching it as a means to achieve a specific purpose. As Jon Kabat-Zinn argues "Meditation is neither shutting things out nor off. It is seeing things clearly, and deliberately positioning yourself directly in relationship to them...[mindfulness] cannot be attained by misguided attempts to suppress the mind's natural activity." (Kabat-Zinn). Unlike earlier forms of behavioral and cognitive-behavioral therapy, this therapeutic approach focuses on changing one's response to experience rather than directly altering experience. Instead of making reality the focus of one's attention, mindfulness is a technique for positioning oneself to see reality "clearly" while not rejecting it or "[suppressing]t the mind's natural activity." Because attempts to modify, suppress, or make the mind's natural activity result in delusions that can impede overall wellbeing, mindfulness necessitates respect for both experience and the mind's natural activity. Instead, it provides clarity and a clear path to reality that combines human mediation with the phenomenological emergence of the natural world, human activity with immediate or natural being. Self-realization is characterized as a "effortless activity" developed through attentive or mindful practices that are intentional but not instrumental. A new capacity to let execution evolve without regard to technique, effort, or thought is given rise to by mindfulness. As a result, action takes on the pure expressions of art, being, and letting go of all doing—a joining of the body and mind in motion (Kabat-Zinn). When one confuses their perception of reality with reality itself, instrumental rationality—thought that gives form to the materiality of existence and gives it a meaning and a purpose—becomes a cause of delusion. "What we call "the self" is really a construct of our own mind. If we could only recognize the process of selfing as an ingrained habit and then give ourselves permission to take the day off, to stop trying so hard to be "somebody," and instead just experience being, perhaps we would be a lot happier" (Kabat-Zinn). The cognitive instrumentalization of experience is also a source of delusion in mindfulness literature because it presumes that the self is given or the agent of thought. The term "self" refers to a regular cognitive construction, which means that rather than being the source of rational thought, the self is produced by the habit of rational thought. Instead, mindfulness forces people to "just experience being" by suspending judgment, or "nonjudgement," which is the imposition of a purpose or goal onto experience in order to make it meaningful or valuable. By doing this, the "mindful" subject comes to unveil and discover a more authentic sense of self that accomplishes the potential union of existence and essence, respectively mind and body, and promotes the

growth of "our truest nature." (Kabat-Zinn) Contrarily, the means of gaining access to this real nature are themselves imbued by an investment in purposeful practice, but one that is allegedly motivated by self-realization for its own sake instead of by the instrumental exploitation of means toward bigger and given ends. This self-realization idea re-embeds or redirects individual desire toward self-investment and self-transformation while transcending externally oriented individual goals and pragmatic utility. Therefore, by replacing purposeful individual experience and self-fashioning for external objects of transformation, mindfulness can help to restrain politically motivated activity that is directed outwardly. Through purposeful attention and nonjudgement, mindfulness promotes and fosters a particular connection to the self, one that regards the self as an object of transformation and investment. The emphasis on non-judgement stems from the idea that our judgments frequently cause psychic distress, distort reality, and prevent us from discovering our true identities and potential. Our attachments, predisposition to explain our experiences, and the desire for external objects as a source of self-fulfillment are the major causes of judgment. In order to practice non-judgement, we must let go of our need for external methods of self-realization as well as our tendency to rationalize our experiences. Instead, mindfulness invites us to pay attention to our experiences without giving them meaning and to focus our desires inward toward the natural pathways to self-realization that are already present, thus can be found in just being what we already are in the moment. Little importance is attributed to the self's relation to others or to the outer world in this framework, except to let go of external events over which the individual subject has no control. The negation of external objects of desire and change might translate to a disavowal of the motivating goals of political activity and the methods for pursuing those goals if this subject theory is applied to the field of politics. Thus, adopting a position of non-judgement and detachment through mindfulness techniques may imply a sense of political disengagement and numbing of political sensibility. By maintaining that mindfulness really better prepares people to live responsibly by offering an unmediated view to things "as they truly are," Jon Kabat-Zinn counters this criticism: "Meditation is not about attempting to disappear or turn into a contemplative zombie incapable of interacting with the real world and dealing with genuine issues. It's about observing things objectively and without bias or distortions coming from our own thought processes" (Kabat-Zinn). Although mindfulness may offer a way to recognize the ideological distortions that shape our perception of the world as the result of false awareness, it does not give users the tools to address or alter the external factors influencing their experiences. It fosters responsibility, but just toward and for oneself. That being said, mindfulness cannot serve as a form of (collective)

politics in and of itself, not that it is intrinsically depoliticizing. Instead, mindfulness as it is used in America adopts a theory of human behavior that embraces material externality rather than fighting it and aims to change the self rather than the external world. The desire for political action may be redirected toward individual self-realization, a self-realization that is independent of collective transformation, under the guise of neoliberalism, even though the coexistence of the internally focused action of mindfulness and the externally focused action of politics can and unquestionably does coexist. The neoliberal organization of social and material life, which seeks to depoliticize and disseminate collective politics, may coopt mindfulness for this purpose. In this model, the collective effort of political action might be replaced by the frequently crucial self-care work of practicing mindfulness (The often-important self-care work of mindfulness in this schema can substitute for the collective work of political action). This is not to point out that mindfulness if used as a neoliberal technology of subjectification provides an inaccurate or mystifying representation of reality or theory of the subject that needs to be rejected. The neoliberalization of mindfulness instantiates a much more comprehensive and effective remaking of subjectivity, one that emphasizes the individual choice to, in the words of Jon-Kabat-Zinn, “take responsibility for [one’s] own life.” (Kabat-Zinn) It can run the risk of placing individual investment in and enhancement of personal well-being above all else: Mindfulness practices are centered upon the development of the individual’s capacity to become more attuned to the present moment and to make active choices about how to respond to stimuli. As a widespread practice that expounds the virtues of the individual’s freedom to choose as a route to a more fulfilled life, mindfulness discourse arguably reinforces neoliberal capitalism’s valuing of individual freedom of choice. Mindfulness offers flexibility and responsiveness in making decisions, which are both features of the ideal neoliberal agent. For instance, in a passage concerned with the freedom to choose, Williams, Teasdale, Segal and Kabat-Zinn (2007) state that mindful awareness ‘expands the field of choices available to us and increases the likelihood that we will make healthy, wise, skillful choices rather than being carried along by the momentum of what we habitually do (Arthington, 2016). Hence, under neoliberal governance, mindfulness is not an ideological deception but rather a useful subjectivity construction that has specific (de-)political outcomes. Neoliberalism forces and creates subjects bound by market rationality who understand competition and free will, and thus subjects who are accountable for their decisions as all facets of human life are rebuilt in accordance with market measures and goals. Through techniques of self-investment that focus on making subjects attentive, creative, adaptable, knowledgeable, and self-regulating, mindfulness offers a way of

increasing one's capacity for competition which is defined as a "flexibility and responsiveness in making judgments". By basing agency on one's ability to access, enhance, measure, manage, and achieve one's "best self" through individual effort, it also provides freedom of choice despite external circumstances. Because they uphold the idea of individual autonomy, economize the most private aspects of subjective life, hold subjects to take responsibility for their own well-being, and replace therapeutics with the work of politics, these forms of self-fashioning are essential to the therapeutic regime of neoliberalism. In order to develop a self-awareness that serves as an investment in one's well-being and capacity for speculation, mindfulness plays an active role in the subject's relationship to the self as a therapeutic technique. Therefore, it offers a path for achieving the neoliberalization of the subject, which is identified as a means to alter the aspirations, deeds, information, and mediation of subjective psychic life in accordance with neoliberal measurements and objectives. As a therapeutic method for realizing one's potential, mindfulness promotes and encourages self-improvement, self-control, self-knowledge, and self-expression. It is for all the above-listed reasons that mindfulness in recent years has been implemented and employed in strategies of corporate wellness and administration in order to push employees to invest and to fight for the achievement of their own well-being and to transfer their individual well-being onto that of the whole firm for the benefit of the entire corporation, thus being responsible and well individually to the advantage of the corporate community. Through the instillation of an internal regime that forces subjects to actualize themselves in every aspect of life, including work, the therapeutic approach to corporate governance and wellness that incorporates mindfulness strategies objectivizes the subject as an easy-to-be-controlled figure of wellness and corporate control. It is crucial to note that while employee wellness initiatives increase productivity on an individual level, they also consolidate and place individual investments in well-being within the well-being of the business. Although the need for workplace safety regulations has been a crucial component of governance in the United States since the beginning of the 20th century, these interventions have only recently been expanded to include not just compensation for or even the prevention of illness or injury at work, but also a beneficial construction of health and well-being in and even through the work environment. This strategy seems to be at odds with traditional liberal governance, which views economy and labor as a field of private exchange, an independent and sovereign domain that governmental politics should respect and only seldom interfere in. Therefore, since their development in the early 20th century, government regulations of private industry in the area of workplace wellness have, for the most part, concentrated on basic protections from and

affordances for injury and disease induced by work. In 2011, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), a branch of the national Center for Disease Control and Prevention, launched an initiative aiming to enlarge research and develop policies related to workplace safety and wellness that encompasses a more broad and comprehensive method to worker's health and well-being under the name of Total Worker Health (TWH) Program. Being defined as a set of "policies, programs, and practices that integrate protection from work-related safety and health hazards with promotion of injury and illness prevention efforts to advance worker well-being," the TWH approach builds upon "the recognition that work is a social determinant of health" while assuming that "advancing the safety, health, and well-being of the workforce may be helpful for individuals, their families, communities, employers and the economy as a whole." (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) This program approaches the traditional field of workplace wellness in a different manner. In fact, the TWH agenda betrays a more comprehensive governmental strategy targeting work and business. As stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, following work and work environments changes to meet the many demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century economies, comprehensive approaches are needed in order to address more complex realities. In that, TWH is a comprehensive approach that seeks new solutions to long-term issues related to worker safety and health. This program offers the chance to improve employee creativity, foster innovation and enhance productivity by creating safe and health-enhancing work and work environments (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health). The constructed environment of the workplace, the social structure and corporate culture along with employee psychological and emotional health are just a few of the many factors that go into well-being and may be invested in for corporate improvement (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015). With the premise that fostering individual well-being will translate into the wellness of the entire organism as a whole, not just the corporation, but "the economy as a whole", this enormous governmental infrastructure is reflected in workplace norms and best practices. Even though a "healthy" company, or economy, is unquestionably one that operates in an efficient and profitable way, in this case "wellness" is evaluated not based on profit, rather it is measured by referring to a greater sense of social value. However, this social value is not altruistic. Instead of using direct disciplinary action, the promotion of individual worker wellbeing is presented as an investment in individual human capital through environmental "enhancements". Yet, rather of focusing solely on labor exploitation, improving each individual's human capital becomes a



key strategy for the company's speculative capital augmentation, with the word "speculative" meaning that this investment is not exclusively or predominantly based on the intrinsic worth of a corporation related to production and profit, but rather on the prospective value of improved economic, social, and political credit. TWH's approach to corporate governance reveals a neoliberal logic that is not just negative, or, in other words focused on minimizing government intervention or the laissez-faire principle to maintain the "natural" functioning of the economy; rather, it is largely positive in that it actively constructs what is natural. In this case, the economy of the firm must be made to work rather than left to do so, and its performance is equated to a greater sense of social well-being as determined by credit. Neoliberal governance seeks to improve and constructively develop its target through environmental interventions rather than focusing on security, the "night watchmen" state of classical liberalism. These beneficial interventions are justified more widely by a logic of speculative enhancement, that is to say the realization of potential latent value that is socially or relationally derived (Haiven, 2014), rather than only by appeal to the protection of the population's physical or economic health. The TWH is an example of this neoliberal approach to governance in that it views the workplace as a constructive object of intervention that, through specific governmental techniques, may provide expanding sources of valorization, a site to enlarge not just productivity but "creativity" and "innovation" by investing in employees' well-being. TWH looks on ways to improve working circumstances and conditions so as to both safeguard employees from risks and enhance their health and well-being. The idea that risk factors in the workplace can lead to issues previously thought to be unconnected to work is now supported by scientific evidence. The TWH method focuses on how environmental and organizational elements associated to work might damage or improve overall worker health in acknowledgement of these links, some of which are newly noticed, and others based on existing scientific evidence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health). It is important to highlight that corporate wellness programs have adapted the "third wave" cognitive behavioral emphasis on mindfulness as an effective therapy approach for treating a variety of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional health conditions as well as enhancing overall well-being. As a matter of fact, TWH has made available a number of studies through the CDC and other organizations that support the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in corporate wellness and their integration as a useful governmental therapeutic method for enhancing overall employee and corporate well-being. A recent study concluded that "worker groups with low rates of engagement in mindfulness practices could most benefit from workplace mindfulness interventions" (Kachan

et al., 2017). This study, which was conducted through the National Health Interview Survey and published in the CDC journal Preventing Chronic Disease in 2017, found out that "mindfulness-based practices can improve workers' health and reduce employers' costs by attenuating the negative effect of stress on workers' health." Instead of treating stress reduction as a secondary goal of corporate wellness programs, TWH treats it as the primary goal. This is because, in addition to being associated with improved employee health and lower healthcare costs for the employer, stress reduction has a positive impact on raising the level of "engagement" in the workplace. The same study further recommends that mindfulness-centered wellness programs be applied to the wider workforce panorama, not only in large businesses like those in the technology industry where mindfulness has become a normative characteristic of corporate wellness, but also in blue collar and service industries: "Improving institutional factors limiting access to mindfulness-based wellness programs and addressing existing beliefs about mindfulness practices among underrepresented worker groups could help eliminate barriers to these programs." (Kachan et al., 2017). Parallel to the growth of mindfulness as a recognized trend in psychology was business administration, an ostensibly unrelated subject that also sought to control human productivity. Business administration in the second half of the 20th century was already greatly influenced by cognitive behavioral psychology before incorporating mindfulness into its mode of governance, particularly in its application of Herbert Simon's behavioral economics and his account of the role of cognition in economic decision-making. Simon argues that it is the duty of administration to create the conditions necessary for individuals in an organization to make rational decisions while acknowledging the limits of homo oeconomicus' bounded rationality in his work on the "decision-making processes in administrative organization," *Administrative Behavior* (1945) (Simon, 1959). These limits are brought on by a lack of all necessary information as well as by the limited ability of decision-makers, whether internal or external. Simon came to the conclusion that the rational liberal principle of utility maximization is not sufficient to account for all the necessarily spontaneous conditions that inspire and direct the decision-making process in a particular situation and environment, whether it be at the level of the individual actor or bigger conglomerate units. As a result, behavioral economics replaces the profit maximization concept that underpins classical liberalism at the level of the individual and the enterprise with a more comprehensive explanation of interest as a causal mechanism. More precisely, the focus of behavioral economics is not utility maximization, which in classical theory results in market equilibrium, but rather behavioral economics is moved by the conditions of "survival," an investment in

well-being that creates an equilibrium between "motivations" (include but are not limited to profit) and "contributions" (including but not limited to labor). After the discourse in the lecture which earned him the Nobel Prize in 1978 in which he stated that a given organization's "survival conditions [are] positive profits rather than maximum profits," which "permits a departure from the assumptions of perfect rationality" (Simon, 1978), Herbert Simon came to realize that a theory of rationality based exclusively on utility maximization as a constant and absolute incentive for economic actors is inevitably constrained. Maximizing profits may not be in a company's best interest, because it could negatively influence its ability to survive. Here, maximum profits are not an intrinsic constant motivation, but rather, one that may and must be developed and induced by organizations. This marks a change from classical liberalism. We can infer from Simon's focus on positive profit that the survival of an organization depends majorly on investments in participants' identification with and "attachment to the organization and its goals" rather than on monetary "inducements" (Simon, 1992). A model of speculative investment oriented toward survival and ongoing positive surplus, rather than purely monetary maximum profit, serves as a motivation for the various corporate wellness programs that prevail in the business and financial world today, including the growing integration of mindfulness in the workplace. Mindfulness is a highly appealing investment for businesses because it helps "activate" better employees and managers, assisting in decision-making processes that no longer strictly follow the utility-maximizing and rational logics, and it attracts firms because it also improves the overall smooth functioning and speculative value of organizations. This explains its acceptance by corporate culture at the turn of the twenty-first century, as well as its growing importance in modern business administration and decision-making. For instance, the tech prodigy Steve Jobs was studying Zen philosophy in the 1970s and was one the first CEOs to introduce mindfulness to the world of corporate culture. Apple now allows its employees to meditate for half an hour during the workday and provides on-campus meditation rooms and mindfulness trainings. Similarly, Monsanto, a multibillion-dollar agricultural corporation, is credited with launching the first corporate mindfulness program in the United States in 1996, when then-CEO Bob Shapiro organized a three-day silent retreat for company executives led by a meditation expert. But, even before Jobs and Shapiro, mindfulness was a useful technique in the corporate world, albeit perhaps unknowingly. In the 1970s, Pierre Wack, an executive at the Royal Dutch/Shell group of companies, was an avid student and practitioner of Buddhist meditation, and he applied the knowledge acquired from his mindfulness practice to the strategic administrative practice of scenario planning. Scenario planning, which is widely used in a variety of

industries, is a structured and adaptable method for organizations to make future plans in order to minimize the adverse effects of unforeseeable events. Wack defines scenario planning as “consciously training the mind” in order to change one's perception of a specific situation: “Scenarios are concerned with two worlds: facts and perceptions. They look for facts but are more interested in the perceptions of decision-makers. Their mission is to collect and transform strategic information into new perspectives.” (Wack, 1985). In scenario planning, the mindfulness-based technique of redirecting perceptions is used to reach more beneficial strategies for future action. Mindfulness is transformed here from a mental health and fitness exercise to a corporate technique for implementing better business practices. “The practice of mindfulness is helping people manage stress and maximize creativity” says Wack. However, he continues “mindfulness is much more than a mental fitness tool; it is a valuable asset for leaders who want to perceive — and re-perceive — the world and make better strategic decisions.” (Wack, 1985).

Even though mindfulness arose and started to become a basis for organizational strategy and scenario planning in the 1970s, it entered the world of business administration only at the end of the 1990s under the name of employee wellness programs. Today, we have a vast number of wellness programs that aim at the overall well-being of employees. While an illusory concept, well-being denotes not only a more comprehensive approach to health, but also an understanding that the subject's health capacity is contingent and expansive rather than fundamentally given. Being healthy is not the ultimate goal to be achieved, but rather an ongoing investment in well-being that considers and involves all aspects of human life. As a result, the effect of controlling, encouraging, and disciplining subjects to invest in well-being permeates our lives much more deeply than previous regimes of health governance and corporate wellness. As Henry Albrecht, CEO of Limeade, a famous corporate wellness software company, stated, the aim is to “help employees bring their full potential to work” (Albrecht, 2016). In line with the theory of human capital, the realization of the subject's potential serves a dual purpose: the self-management of individual subjects, establishing a relationship of the self to the self, and the regulation and securitization of the population to which individuals belong; that is, technologies of the self and technologies of government produce subjects that improve both their individual well-being and that of the larger organic whole. Along with the emphasis on individual employee well-being in corporate wellness, these programs promising to activate employees' potential capacities are done for the benefit of the entire company: “every wellness program contributes to the strides being made toward a healthier corporate environment.” (Kohll, 2016). Corporate well-being is mirrored in the

company's value. According to a 2016 study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, “stock values for a portfolio of companies that received high scores in a corporate health and wellness self-assessment appreciated by 235 percent over a 6-year simulation period, compared to the S&P 500 Index appreciation of 159 percent.” (Grossmeier, 2016) The company's value is determined in this case, not solely by profit, but by speculative appreciation or a generally positive structure of the company's well-being. Mindfulness becomes particularly important in the context of corporate well-being. Following a 2017 survey named "Embracing a Broader Definition of Well-Being" carried out by the National Business Group on Health (NBGH) and sponsored by Fidelity Investments, 35% of the 141 companies who responded provided mindfulness classes or in the workplace, with an extra 26% considering introducing it in the future. The NGBH's survey and subsequent "webinar" to its members, the majority of whom were Fortune 500 companies, promised to enhance organizational wellness by highlighting the foregoing steps:

- Define well-being
- Types of health and wellness programs offered
- Levels of incentives to engage employees and domestic partners
- Use of outcome-based incentives to reward for goals/outcomes
- Use of non-financial-based incentives to reward for goals/outcomes
- Measurement tactics and program participation results
- Future of health improvement investment amidst healthcare reform (National Business Group on Health, 2017)

Beyond physical and emotional or mental health, the publication includes an "overall" definition of well-being that includes "financial security," "social connectedness," and "community involvement"—all of which are on the rise as aspects of the "well-being strategy" of companies surveyed. It also shows that employees are investing more in incentives, such as health-risk and financial management programs, "lifestyle management coaching," "resiliency training," "happiness programs," "teletherapy," and, of course, "mindfulness classes or trainings." Non-monetary incentives are also increasing rise, with 67 percent of businesses providing at least one type, such as "employee or group recognition," "raffles," "charitable giving," "PTO," "branded SWAG," and "health and wellness equipment/prizes." The incorporation of all of these disparate aspects of well-being into business strategy exposes the neoliberal schism between the distinct realms of human social, economic, and political life, with the corporate investment in human capital going deeper into

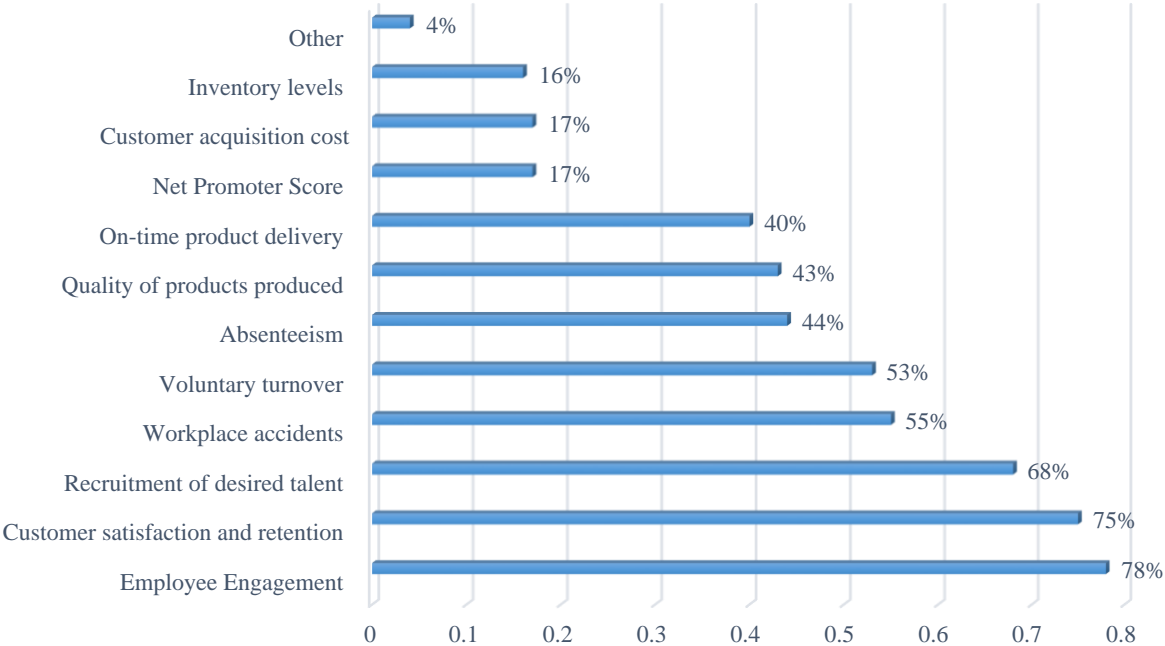
individuality, personality, and subjective experience (National Business Group on Health, 2017). The NBGH survey's expanded definition of well-being, which includes not only physical or psychological well-being but also cultural and social aspects, reflects the type of speculative value unique to finance capitalism. Financial speculation is a process of valuing a commodity based on its expected market value rather than its intrinsic value related to production. Human capital is valued in neoliberal regimes through speculative investment in and extraction of not only monetary value, but a much broader social or relational value of the subject. Following the premise that, from the standpoint of neoliberal rationality, subjectivity is primarily defined functionally rather than ontologically, identities and characteristics originally believed to naturally belong to the subject are detached from their nature in the subject and turned into capacities or speculative units of potential investment. Thus, while neoliberal subjects can “alter their human capital—by diversifying or changing their behaviors and social interactions—they can never sell it.” To summarize, instead of a possessive kind of relationship, as it is that of the free labor with his or her labor power, the relationship between the neoliberal subject and his or her human capital should be called *speculative*, in every sense of the word.” (Feher, 2009). Workplace wellness programs, where a "expanded definition of well-being is now the norm," demonstrate how these sites of speculative investment can boost not only an individual's human capital portfolio but also the company's overall credit. Evidently, the organization's speculative value is now regarded as inextricably linked to a wide range of intimate aspects of an individual's life. According to the NBGH survey, the evolution of well-being now includes "financial security," "community involvement," "social connectedness," "job satisfaction," and "purpose in life or 'spiritual contentment'". Even so, the organismic relationship between the individual and the whole does not follow the same logic as classical liberalism's invisible hand. Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand according to which individual self-interested pursuit would, if left alone, lead to maximum collective prosperity, understood self-interest too narrowly as a means to maximize profit. Besides, the concept of freedom that characterises Smith's schema is interpreted negatively, as individual freedom from interference. Instead, here we perceive interest defined as something essentially mutable, contingent, and social/relational, belonging to a higher order of rationality than utilitarian maximization—and freedom defined as a positive form of investment in one's entire self or well-being. The more "holistic" approach to health and wellness shown here, particularly the acknowledgement that "community involvement" and "social connectedness" are important aspects of individual well-being, marks a major departure from both previous corporate management techniques, which

regarded employee wellness as an issue of the individual, and classical liberal approaches to governance as a problem of securing the individual from the state. Corporate governance in the form of wellness programs views communal life not as a problem to be solved or ignored, but as a means for individuals to realize their full potential for well-being. This positive individual-totality relationship resembles neoliberal approaches to the social framework as a primary site of intervention and behavioral psychology's emphasis on environmental causes and determinants, though instances of neoliberalism frequently avoid the category of "society" in favor of the individual and the family, if only rhetorically. Society, within the Austrian tradition is replaced by the market as a collection or coordination of individuals because the market offers a rationality that extends beyond the limitations of individual knowledge as well as a means of influencing or governing the individual. In this sense, Hayek's belief that individual knowledge is strictly limited and that individual demands actually disrupt the cohesion of the spontaneous order of the market, which by itself can coordinate individual knowledge, is a collectivist idea (Feher, 2018). In a similar vein, the Ordoliberal presentation of the social framework and *Vitalpolitik* for governance speaks not only to how the economy and society are interconnected, but also to how governmental intervention into the social fabric can and must properly integrate atomized individuals in an enterprise society, offsetting the collectivizing consequences of proletarianization, or "the social irrationality of capitalism" (Foucault, 2011; Röpke, 1950).

The implementation of non-financial incentives and programs in corporate wellness are one way in which the corporate administration of well-being creates individualizing and totalizing effects through intervention in social life. According to the NBGH study, nearly 80% of the companies polled had "emotional or mental health" programs such as "stress management," "resiliency training," "mindfulness classes or trainings," "teletherapy," and "happiness programs". Instead of providing mental and emotional health care through company insurance policies, these services are frequently found in-house or contracted directly through the company. There are two reasons why mental and emotional health programs are important: 1) These programs provide insurance against any kind of collectivizing tendency that result from such outcomes, employees are less inclined to create unions if their work helps them manage stress by offering mindfulness courses and happiness programs. 2) Assuming that the work environment, as previously said, is a social determinant of workers' health, they offset the negative health consequences that arise from the nature of work that may cause disengagement, low productivity, or absenteeism. They substitute identification with the collective of labor for identification with the entire company. Based on the NBGH study,

there has been a 13% increase in mindfulness lessons or trainings offered among companies' emotional/mental health programs, with the majority (61%) of companies implementing or planning to implement mindfulness in their future well-being strategy. Why is there an increase in mindfulness programs in particular? Because mindfulness is frequently regarded as a successful therapy for cognitive issues that relate to attention and engagement. According to the NBGH report, in addition to lowering health-care costs, among the primary goals of corporate wellness programs implemented by members we find employee "engagement," "productivity," and "retention," with 78 percent of the companies surveyed citing employee engagement as the most "critical business operational metric," even surpassing "customer satisfaction and retention." (National Business Group on Health, 2017) The priority placed on employee engagement exemplifies Simon's theory that a firm's survival is dependent upon the identification or sense of belongingness of the individual to the larger corporation as a whole. The importance of identification with totality is evidenced by the larger goals of developing a harmonious corporate culture, not just an environment which allows employees to express their potential, thereby realizing the company's potential. Once more, the value axis is not solely economic. The value of a company is defined less by corporate profits and more by broader relational or social value.

**Beyond financial metrics, which of the following does your company consider critical business operational metrics?**





#### **4.1 A critique to mindfulness: does it promote the well-being of the individual or is it a tool to increase the company's productivity?**

The above-displayed data appears to confirm behavioral economics' insight that organizational decisions are premised on an investment in "survival" rather than utility maximization or profit, and that a company's survival is linked not just to worker productivity driven by financial incentives, but to their investment and engagement in the company's identity. This type of value, based on credit or self-esteem, is the primary site of valorization in today's financialized economy, a process that generates value primarily through speculative rather than capital investment (Feher, 2018). As such, not only is the principal mode of economic valorization turned into finance capitalism, the economic mode constitutive of neoliberal governance, likewise is subjective valorization. Similarly, the subject's value is considered not only in terms of labor-power as a source of economic wealth, but rather it is evaluated based on the functional capacity to develop emergent potential. This mechanism regards "organs" of organizations and institutions, business employees, as functional parts in the service of a larger corporate autonomy that must be "incentivized" to self-invest in their individual well-being in order to enhance the corporation's well-being, which is assessed by credit, self-esteem, or share-holder value (Feher, 2018). The organismic principle of organizational politics, just at core of the constitution of a social or political community (the State in Hegel or Class in Marx), invigorates the corporate organism, transforming politics into an economic technique in the investment or preservation of a "corporate community." Furthermore, this unusual organizational structure implies that the administration and management of the population, in this case, the company, involves the administration and management of the "whole well-being" of the individual employee in accordance with Foucault's account of both biopolitical governance and the individualizing techniques of the self. According to the NBSGH survey, mindfulness practices and, more broadly, programs targeting emotional and mental health, such as "resiliency trainings" and "stress management" classes, have evolved into crucial component of corporate administration "best practices." (Hoffman; Kennedy-Armbruster, 2015).

## Chapter 4 – Capitalism and Mindfulness

### 1. Defining Capitalism

Based on the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Capitalism is defined as “an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market” (Merriam-Webster).

More specifically, capitalism is an economic system in which private actors own and control property in accord with their interests, and demand and supply freely set prices in markets in a way that can serve the best interests of society (Baumol, William J., Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, 2007). The motive to make profit is the one essential characteristic and premise of capitalism. The two parties involved into a voluntary exchange transaction both have an individual interest in the result, but it has to be a mutually beneficial kind of transaction in which neither side can get what he or she wants unless the other gets what he or she desires. It is through this type of rational self-interest that economic prosperity can be achieved. As opposed to socialism, a set of economic and political theories according to which the state owns the means of production and state-owned enterprises aim to maximize social good instead of seeking for profit maximization (Jahan; Mahmud), in a capitalist economic environment, capital assets like mines, factories and railroads for example, can be owned and controlled privately. Furthermore, in a capitalist economy, labor is purchased for monetary wages, capital gains are realized by private owners, and prices allocate capital and labor among competing uses (Baumol, William J., Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, 2007). While in the past century two major approaches to economic organization existed and coexisted, capitalism and socialism, nowadays the former has become the basis for nearly all worldwide economies. Capitalism builds on the following premises:

- Self-interest which allows people to act in order to pursue their own good, with no regard for sociopolitical pressure;
- A market mechanism fixing prices in a decentralized way through interactions between buyers and sellers. Prices, in turn, allocate resources, which naturally seek the highest reward, not only for goods and services but also for wages;
- Private property, which gives people the freedom to own both tangible assets (land) and intangible assets (bonds and stocks);

- Freedom of choice concerning investment, production, and consumption. Dissatisfied customers can buy different products, investors can pursue more profitable projects, and workers can leave jobs for better pay;
- The government's role is limited to protecting private citizens' rights and maintaining an organized environment that allows markets to function properly;
- Competition that maximizes social welfare by allowing firms to enter and exit markets freely (Baumol, William J., Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, 2007).

The degree to which the above-mentioned pillars function distinguishes different types of capitalism. Markets in free markets, also known as laissez-faire economies, operate with very little or even no regulation as production and prices are determined by demand (Team, T. I., 2022). Markets play a dominant role in mixed economies, so named because of the blend of markets and government, but government intervenes to a greater extent aiming to correct market failures, promote social welfare; and for defense and public safety reasons. Today, mixed capitalist economies prevail. A further distinction is made between two other different economic systems: command and mixed economies. The first is an economic system in which the government controls production and prices of goods and services. Sometimes referred to as planned economy, in a command economic system the government is the central planner. As a consequence, in a command economy, because the government sets and controls all aspects of business, there is no competition and monopolies are frequent. Because it is tough for one single entity, the government, to satisfy the needs of everyone in the country, command economies frequently produce excessive amounts of one product but not enough of another. As a result, a command economy frequently produces significant surpluses or shortages of goods and services. A command economy differs from a free-market or capitalist economy. Manufacturing and production in a free-market economic system are based on the laws of supply and demand, requiring little or no government intervention. North Korea, Iran, Libya, and Cuba are all examples of command economies today. China used to be a command economy before transitioning to a mixed economy with communist and capitalist ideals (Hall M., 2021). The second is partly run by the government and partly as a free market economy, which is an economic system that includes no government intervention and is mainly driven by the logic of supply and demand. Most of the world's major economies are now mixed economies that combine socialism and capitalism, and governments in many of these mixed economies use fiscal or monetary policies to encourage growth during economic downturns. A mixed economic system, in general, includes both the public and private sectors. A mixed economy has limited government regulation, whereas a command economy has extensive

government regulation and control. Governments allow corporations to prosper in a mixed economy, but profit levels may be constrained by taxation or tariffs. A mixed economy, unlike a command economy, may not have surpluses or shortages of products and services because given the fact that manufacturing and production are set by the market, goods and services are distributed where and when they are required. Prices are also determined by the dynamic of supply and demand rather than by the government, as they are in the command economy. Producer profitability and innovation are also crucial aspects of the mixed economic system (Hall M., 2021).

## 2. Varieties of Capitalism

In comparative political economy, how various models of capitalism differ from one another is of utmost importance. The discourse of comparing institutional configurations across countries has given rise to a plethora of typologies that describe the essential characteristics of different welfare production regimes. In the latest half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century different forms of capitalist economies were consolidated and established in the United States, Western Europe, Japan and other countries of the world. The central element all capitalist economies share no matter their unique characteristics is the private ownership of the means of production, while the role played by the state, the market and other institutions differs from country to country and from model to model (Regini, M., 2000).

From what the literature suggests, there are two models of capitalism of reference:

- **Market-oriented systems**, typical of Anglo-Saxon economies such as North America and Great Britain in which private ownership substantially predominates;
- **Relationship-oriented systems** diffused in Central Europe, Rhénan and Japanese models where narrow (network-oriented) or closed (bank-oriented) ownership structures prevail. (Rhodes, M., & van Apeldoorn, B., 2011)

Based on the fact that business decisions and the capital market both reflect this approach, models of capitalism can be further divided into:

- **Outsider model** (Anglo-Saxon model), which is strongly oriented toward the venture capital market, where individuals who are in direct contact with the management, with firms having widespread share ownership and high risk of conflicts of interest between shareholders and managers have a major influence on decisions relevant to the firm;

- **Insider model** (Rhénan capitalism), which is oriented toward the role of intermediaries and focuses on the resources provided by shareholders or the banking system. Here, decisions are in the hands of individuals who have in-depth knowledge of the business, with firms with stable shareholder ownership and potential conflicts of interest between controlling and minority shareholders and between shareholders and lenders (Albert, M., 1993).

Differences in the organizational structures of the two models lead to different corporate governance systems, with different roles and functional responsibilities of the corporate bodies of the enterprise itself. Generally speaking, in market-oriented systems (outsider model) a one-tier internal organization of the enterprise prevails (one-tier system), whereas in other systems (insider model) a two-tier organization (two-tier system) predominates. A large body of literature usually identifies, amongst the most prominent categorizations, three main forms of capitalism, inspired both by a different market concept and the social cohesion of the enterprise within the market itself: the Anglo-Saxon model, the Rhénan model, and the Japanese vision (Allen, F.; Carletti, E.; Marquez, R., 2007).

The Anglo-Saxon model is inspired by liberalism and free competition is central to the entire economic system. The financial market serves as a benchmark for assessing the firm's performance and management, with the preference to evaluate results on a short-term basis. There is also a tendency to separate ownership and management, in the sense that the manager does not answer to a reference shareholder but in fact sees the market as his controlling "shareholder".

Key to the entire economic system is the structure and the role played by financial and stock markets. Shareholders are not directly involved in the management of enterprises and public companies prevail (Minsky, H.P., 1998). It is a so-called variable ownership model or, as Porter defines it, a fluid capital market model, where there is continuous interaction with the financial market (Porter M.E., 1998). Under such circumstances, because the manager is continuously judged and evaluated by the market as he or she has to confront and deal with the stock exchange listings, thus the model is transaction-oriented. The stock market price plays a crucial role in pushing the individual investor to decide whether or not to invest in that stock. Hence, there is no identification between ownership and management, instead stock prices are the primary tool for evaluating managers' performances. From an organizational point of view, the board of directors is generally composed of internal top managers, who are entrusted with the management and representation of the company, and external members generally involved in control functions, representing the capital. Clearly, managers have a

great deal of power as they have access to information that other minor stakeholders, who have little power over the management of the enterprise, can't consult. For such a market model to work, however, there must be an efficient and transparent stock market, so that there is a real system of effective shareholder protection. The market must also be highly liquid and submit companies to continuous monitoring, changing stock prices based on information about the company's performance. Furthermore, a specific regulatory framework allowing shareholders and those interacting with the company to be put on the same footing as much as possible, even if intervention in the management of the company is not possible, must be created. The system also works if adequate remuneration in the form of profit distribution is provided and the use of new capital is continuous and simple to be executed (Minsky, H.P., 1998; Baumol, W.J.; Litan, R.E.; Schramm, C.J., 2007).

In contrast, Rhénan, also referred to as Rhenish capitalism, typical of Germany, is a model inspired by a social market economy whose aim is to balance the goal of market competitiveness with social cohesion through forms of consultation and co-determination of welfare policies in which the enterprise is not only an instrument for profit but also plays a social role within the community it operates in. Thus, the enterprise is regarded as a relatively stable structure of social relations.

Given the existence of a reference shareholder, enterprise governance in this case is indirectly delegated to the market which, however, plays a limited role as there is a stable form of venture capital (Müller-Stewens, G. and Schäfer, M., 1997). As defined by Porter, the Rhénan model is a relational or dedicated capital model in which shareholders are motivated to maintain their investments, keep their equities and have an influential role in the choices of the governing body (Porter M.E., 1998). There is a strong concentration of holdings, accompanied by a large network of relationships among the various shareholders. Savers' investment decisions tend to be disconnected from stock market price trends. There are dominant shareholders who guide the management of the company and expect their investments to appreciate in the medium run, hence a stability in the shareholder base. In fact, it is a collaborative model characterized by a powerful control structure on two levels: The Executive Board on the one hand and the Supervisory Board on the other.

Coming along with this model is a specificity in the relationship between bank and enterprise, with a major and decisive role played by the banking system, which results in direct or indirect control of most listed companies, and consequently, little or no possibility for hostile takeovers. At the same time, the stock market remains underdeveloped, opportunities for collaboration between internal managers and bank representatives are likely to arise, antitrust

regulations stay relatively weak, and co-management in the supervisory board increases companies' inertia (Kregel, J.A., 1997). Therefore, it should be noted that while the Anglo-Saxon model rewards the manager based on the overall company performance, the Rhénan model tends to be set to traditional compensation systems. Thus, in the end the Anglo-Saxon firm is more dynamic and prone to enter emerging markets than the Rhénan one, which, on the contrary, is slower in its diversification process. Not of less importance is the Japanese model of capitalism, a highly collaborative model in which core values such as social harmony, employee loyalty to the institution and consequently job security, are crucial. This approach to capitalism is generally considered to be an expanded view of the Rhénan model, in which the long-term time frame is taken as the essential reference in and for business decisions (Vitols S., 1997; Vitols S. and Woolcock S., 1997).

The Japanese or Nippon vision consists of a relational model based on cross-shareholdings: from an organizational point of view, zaibatsu or big family-owned and controlled business groups operating in strict connection with the State, and through a thick network of affiliates in different sectors were the form of organization of production dominating the economy of Japan from mid '800 to WWII. Later in time, zaibatsu were dismantled and the few remaining were transformed into keiretsu or diversified big business groups, organized as a network of firms which can be either horizontally or vertically integrated. These are based on horizontal relationships between groupings of firms, operating in different sectors, linked by cross-shareholdings and systems of participations, where the main actor remains the central bank who is responsible for providing capital, effectively limiting the power of shareholders and thus allowing managers greater freedom of action.

In such a model, the main shareholders of large companies are usually financial institutions who are capable of reducing conflicts in industrial relations. It should be also noted that, in such a model, the presence of the state, which is entrusted both with an institutional role but also with a fiduciary and collaborative function, is fundamental. At the organizational level, the Board of Directors is mainly made up of internal managers coordinated by a strong, powerful chairman. The Board also includes representatives of the company's banks and business partners. The Japanese vision, however, lost consent during the 1990s' financial crisis and from that moment onwards, the entire system of capitalism revolved around the dichotomy between the Anglo-Saxon and the Rhénan models (Posner, R., 2011).

A "sui generis" model of capitalism is that of the Italian market, inspired by family logic and often referred to as Latin capitalism. Until the late 1980s, the Italian capitalist system tended to be a small family capitalism, characterized by a strong presence of family-owned and run

firms, contrasted by a large public or linked to a few powerful families with a reduced role of the stock market form of capitalism in which the state managed large productive sectors of the country. As a result, governance-related issues have always been considered minor and have become topical only in the last two decades. It was only thanks to the privatization process Italy had undergone during the 1990s, that the state started to regulate public utilities, the Italian stock market grew in size to resemble that of an industrialized country, although the role of institutional investors still remains marginal compared to market-oriented countries (Barca F., 2010).

In the Italian industrial system the most widespread and common form of enterprise is the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) which is a company in partnership with other entrepreneurs, a small business that operates in a part of the chain or cooperates with other companies for production and trade of a finished product or service. Different types of SMEs can be recognized based on market segmentation. First of all, “Traditional” SMEs are family businesses, mostly of the first generation. They operate in sectors of the economy characterized by a low degree of competitiveness, often niche markets, where processes of dimensional growth are difficult. The relationship with the banking system is generally linked to financing logic; limited, if not absent, are the relationships with other financial intermediaries.

The second typology worth to be mentioned is the “Transition” SME, so defined either because the companies are in strategic or generational transition or because they belong to a group. In this case, the environment in which they operate is more complex and often more turbulent, precisely because of the choices of business development and change the company must face. This type of enterprise requires strong inputs from the financial system in order to support development policies, even though the relationship is mediated by the group to which they belong; in any case, the use of multiple financing banks is more evident here than in other realities.

Last but not least, “Complex” SMEs are characterized by excellence in the sector in which they operate, which is often highly competitive and also open to international logics; the support of the financial and banking system is fundamental. It should be noted that our system has dealt with the problems of small family capitalism and succession, not through the Anglo-Saxon logic of the merchant bank but through the system of the public rescue institution.

The stock market in Italy has always been a very limited discourse without any particular influence, also in view of the small number of listed companies, the lack of institutional investors, and the marginal role of banks, which do not directly control the enterprise, but



only act as lenders of the enterprise. Moreover, in Italy it is difficult to find public companies with a broad shareholder base, where there is no reference entity other than the market. It was only following the privatization process, the reform of the banking law and the regulations on the functioning of financial markets, that a change has been witnessed in the structures of the major groups.

Even nowadays, the Italian system recognizes a strong presence of the state, of the banking-insurance system, which has led to the creation of some large banking groups who have direct interests also in controlling the Italian Industry. Such a model can work as long as it operates within a closed economic system and as long as the state has sufficient resources to support development (Bragantini S., 2005).

To summarize, the Italian model is quite an unconventional one, in which there is neither a role of the stock exchange, typical of the Anglo-Saxon market, nor a role of the managing banking system, as in the German case, but public or semi-private companies still prevail and few influential families control most of the large companies thanks to a network of interrelationships. At the same time, many SMEs, mainly family-owned companies, need financial support for adequate development in an increasingly globalized system (Rhodes, M. and van Apeldoorn, B., 1997).

Although the previous and the following classifications differ because they use different criteria, they eventually present significant similarities. The classification I decided to study deeper in order to draw final conclusions is amongst the most prominent and it is the one outlined by Hall and Soskice who, based on the way production is organized, divide capitalism into two main types: liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). The reason why I chose to elaborate on Hall and Soskice's interpretation of the varieties of capitalism is because, in my opinion, it brings to light facts and considerations that better relate to the issue of work-related stress and its potential causes as it takes into account how LMEs and CMEs view and value levels of job control, workload, decision-making and relationships both outside and within the work environment. According to Krupp Foundation Professor of European Studies in the Department of Government at Harvard and a Faculty Associate of the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies Peter Hall and former School Professor of Political Science and Economics at the London School of Economics David Soskice, respectively author and editor of the political economy masterpiece "Varieties of Capitalism: the institutional foundations of comparative advantage", the competitive market is prevalent in liberal market economies, and the majority of the production process is decentralized, similarly to the free-market capitalism observed in

the United States and the United Kingdom. In contrast, coordinated market economies, such as Germany and Japan, exchange private information through non-market institutions like unions and business associations (Hall and Soskice 2001).

Market connections in liberal market economies (LMEs) are defined by impersonal exchanges of goods and services in a competitive and formal bargaining environment. In LMEs, firms coordinate their activities through hierarchy and competitive marketplaces (Williamson, 1985). The participants involved in the exchange react to the price signals set by the market and modify their willingness to sell and demand products and services accordingly. Additionally, market institutions are quite good at coordinating the actions of many economic actors.

Conversely, in coordinated market economies (CMEs), companies heavily rely on the strategic coordination used in order to manage their interactions with other actors and develop their own unique strengths. These strategic coordinating methods typically rely more on relational contracts, network monitoring based on the sharing of private information within networks and are reliant upon collaborations instead of competitive partnerships. In contrast to LMEs, where the dynamics of supply and demand that develop in competitive markets characterize the equilibrium generated by a firm's activity, in CMEs, the same equilibrium results from the strategic interaction between firms and other actors. Hall and Soskice contend that the political economy's structure and the national institutional structures ingrained in regulatory regimes influence the strategies frequently adopted by businesses to address their primary coordination issues. In LMEs, regulatory policies and regimes tend to foster capital mobility, competitive connections, and flexible labor markets. Consequently, firms' corporate strategies frequently focus on the market. To the contrary, a higher number of institutions in CMEs promote strategic coordination by favoring activities such as:

- The exchange of information among actors;
- The monitoring of behavior;
- The provision of sanctions for defection from cooperative efforts;
- Deliberation on strategic issues (Ostrom, 1990).

However, achieving effective strategic balances also requires the presence of an adequate "common knowledge," which is learned through experience and frequently embodied in a specific industry or national culture.

These two forms of political economy offer a useful illustration of the distinctions between LMEs and CMEs despite the significant and substantial differences existing between the US

and Germany. Corporate governance systems in coordinated market economies grant businesses access to funding sources that are only partially independent from the public disclosure of financial information or current performances. Having access to this so-called "patient capital" enables businesses to engage in long-term projects and maintain highly qualified personnel even during periods of economic recession. The major issue here is that investors must have alternative means of regulating the performance of businesses if financing is to not rely on balance sheet criteria. Dense networks connecting managers and technical personnel from one organization to their counterparts in other enterprises are the solution chosen within CMEs in order to share accurate and precise information about the growth of the enterprise. Investors in Germany have access to information concerning a company's standing, reputation and operational activity through:

- The relationships firms establish with their key suppliers and customers;
- The knowledge secured by extensive networks of cross-shareholdings;
- Membership in industry associations, which gather information and at the same time coordinate standard-setting, technology transfer or vocational training.

In addition to participating in the Aufsichtsrats (supervisory boards) of other businesses, enterprises frequently contribute on product development. Moreover, securities legislation and cross-shareholdings, which deter aggressive takeovers, shield German businesses from incentives to maximize profits. These network monitoring systems are reinforced by firms' internal organizational structures in many CMEs. In Germany, senior management can rarely act alone and must have the approval of the supervisory board, which is made up of key shareholders, entrenched managers, important suppliers, and customers, in addition to employee representation, before making major decisions. Building a company's reputation that is able to release trustworthy information is encouraged by this structural propensity toward consensual decision-making, which makes network monitoring easier. The industrial relations system in Germany establishes salaries through collective bargaining among trade unions and industry groups, frequently in accordance with the terms of a "path-opener" agreement (leading settlement). This system makes it difficult for businesses to "steal" labor from other businesses and ensures workers the highest possible compensation in exchange for their ongoing commitment and deep dedication to the company. It does this by making the wages of workers with similar qualifications working in a given industry uniform. Complementing these institutions at the organizational level is a system of enterprise councils, which encourages employees to invest in and acquire company-specific skills and demonstrate more devotion by promising them protection from arbitrary layoffs or changes in

working conditions (Thelen, 1991). Efficient educational and training systems are extremely relevant given that coordinated market economies employ individuals with high firm- or industry-specific capabilities. Germany relies on trade unions and associations, which in turn rely on a training system sponsored by the government. By encouraging corporations to hire apprentices and monitoring their involvement in such schemes, these associations reduce free-riding attempts to take advantage of training at other enterprises and guarantee that training is compliant with the demands of firms. German companies foster ties that help spread technology. Besides, research is jointly supported by those companies, which frequently work with quasi-public research institutes. Industry associations' promotion of common technical standards helps spread new technologies and creates a shared knowledge that makes it easier for employees of various businesses to work together. Even if differently, liberal market economies make sure that overall economic performance is as good as that of coordinated market economies. Markets for corporate control of LMEs, as in the case of the United States, encourage businesses to take into account recent gains and keep an eye on their stock price. The factors affecting a company's ability to obtain funding are mostly determined by and dependent upon how investors value the company on the stock markets. Companies in liberal market economies rely on the market to create ties with their employees in terms of industrial relations. Usually, senior management is the only one to control the company. It is challenging to accomplish pay coordination throughout the entire economy due to the reduced degree of collaboration and connection amongst unions and corporate organizations. The diffused presence of volatile labor markets influences the strategies pursued by both businesses and individuals. While it is relatively simple for businesses to fire employees or hire new ones to take advantage of new opportunities, it is less appealing to adopt production strategies which are based on the assurance of long-term employment relationships. Instead, people (as individuals) are suggested to invest in generic skills that can be easily transferred from one company to another.

Liberal Market Economies' systems for education and training support dynamic labor markets. Typically, professional training programs are offered through formal schooling that emphasizes generic skills. Whenever in absence of assurances that competitors won't "take" their apprentices, businesses prefer not to invest in apprenticeship programs. Career alternatives, for individuals who want to engage in short-term employment contracts and who find themselves in dynamic labor markets, depend on the development of generic skills and capabilities that may be expendable in a number of different firms no matter the industry in which they operate. In LMEs, B2B partnerships build upon formal contracts and regular

market relationships. Furthermore, rigorous and strict antitrust legislation governs these interactions in the US. The migration of scientists and engineers from one company or research institution to another with movements favored by the existence of flexible labor markets, essentially ensures technology transfers. The differences between liberal and coordinated market economies are further highlighted by the existence of institutional complementarities (Jaikumar 1986; Milgrom and Roberts 1990; 1995). If the presence (or effectiveness) of one institution improves the performance (or effectiveness) of the other, then the two institutions are said to be complimentary in a macroeconomic system. It is feasible to identify complementarities between and within several political economy areas. For instance, Aoki (1994) claimed that where the financial system allows for capital to be gained regardless of current profitability, long-term working relations are more likely to result. On the other hand, when fluid financial markets enable quick capital transfers, the presence of dynamic labor markets leads to higher company returns. In the comparative analysis of the varieties of capitalism, institutional complementarities are very important. Institutions supporting coordination in one area might be employed to promote similar types of coordination in further areas. For instance, business associations that jointly manage apprenticeship programs can find alignment on collective standard setting. Businesses can exert pressure on the government with the aim of pushing it to support institutions that are complementary to the ones that already exist in the economy. Alternatively, through transnational emulation processes, institutional structures with complimentary components may proliferate (Powell and Di Maggio 1991). If such processes take place, countries would be grouped based on the different features characterizing liberal and coordinated market economies. In this sense, while CMEs would have institutions in each of these areas that are characterized by higher degrees of strategic coordination, LMEs would rely on markets to coordinate efforts in the areas of both corporate governance and working relationships. A significant number of countries provide evidence in favor of this idea (Gingerich and Hall, 2002). Seven nations can be classified as LMEs after having analyzed industrialized economies and nations: Israel, Ireland, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Conversely, Germany, South Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Finland, and Norway are the 11 nations that make up the CMEs. While France's industrial elite, who excludes workers, manages coordination amongst firms, Italy shares many coordinated market economies' traits, but it presents regional models of coordination and a national network of enterprises (Hancke, 2001); A different form of capitalism is present in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, which is characterized by networks of

businesses that potentially promote strategic coordination but which is also represented by a trade union system that forbids such coordination due to the existence of rival confederations (Rhodes, 1997). In the long run, both types of capitalism appear to be able to produce satisfactory levels of economic performance though there are systematic differences in other aspects. In reality, there are differences between the two types of economies in terms of their capacity for innovation as well as their distribution of income and employment: while income inequality is high in LMEs, working hours are typically shorter and incomes are more fairly distributed in CMEs. There are significant differences within these two forms of capitalism, such as the degree to which countries in northern Europe and the Far East coordinate their strategic initiatives. Of course, not all global economies fall under either of these two categories (Hall and Soskice, 2001; pp. 33-36). The theory of comparative advantage is frequently misunderstood. This theory is majorly and most widely understood as a concept according to which countries specialize in the production of those goods and services for which they have a comparative advantage, thus, for which they have an abundance of resources (Stolper and Samuelson, 1941). However, the idea of institutional comparative advantage, which holds that firms can perform certain types of activities and produce certain types of goods more efficiently because of the institutional support that their economies provide for such activities, can be used to explain why countries tend to specialize in a given production or in certain goods. This idea is in line with the endogenous growth theory's assertions that institutional factors influence growth rates and technological advancement (Aghion and Howitt, 1998). The main efforts to define these institutions at this time have neglected non-market connections in favor of focusing on market ties and the legal context in which they function. These non-market connections have received increased attention in the research on national innovation systems (Dosi et al. 1998; Porter 1990), where determinants of absolute advantage are typically studied. However, in order to understand national patterns of product or process specialization, it would also be appropriate to search for those institutional aspects that result in comparative advantage (Zysman 1996). In this perspective, the key distinction that needs to be made is that between incremental innovation, which is characterized by small but consistent and continuous improvements to existing products or adjustments to production processes, and radical innovation, which is given by substantial transformation of production lines, development of entirely new goods, or significant changes in the production process. Theoretically, the former type of innovation should be promoted and supported more efficiently by coordinated market economies as it is easier to ensure incremental innovation in those contexts in which the workforce is: skilled enough to come

up with such innovations, protected enough to suggest changes to products or processes without fear of repercussions to their employment, and sufficiently autonomous to view the creation of such improvements as a component of their work. According to this theory, incremental innovation is more likely to take place in environments where workers have opportunities to influence decision-making processes, benefit from job security, autonomy from close control, and have access to skill systems that go beyond task-specific knowledge. These environments also foster inter-firm collaboration, which encourages customers and suppliers to suggest small changes to products or production processes. These relational criteria are typically supported by the institutions of coordinated market economies. To the contrary, liberal market economies tend to encourage radical innovation due to their institutional characteristics. Employers interested in creating a new line of production will hire people with the requested skills knowing that they may fire them whenever the project proves to be unprofitable if there are no impediments to layoffs in labor markets and high worker mobility. Large stock markets with widespread ownership make it possible for businesses looking to obtain breakthrough technologies to do so by acquiring other businesses. LMEs have a vertical, highly hierarchical structure in which the power resides at the top of the organizational chart; this overconcentration of power in the hands of the top management facilitates the latter in adopting completely new business strategies. Market-based inter-firm interactions allow for the speedy acquisition of new technologies through the ability to acquire staff from other companies, hire their employees, and purchase their exploitation rights for new products. As a consequence, national patterns of specialization in activities and products corresponding to national innovation capabilities, whether incremental or radical, should delineate, to the extent permitted by transportation costs and the effectiveness of international marketplaces. Activities that are most closely related to radical innovation should be concentrated in liberal market economies, whereas industries and activities that advance primarily through incremental innovation should be located in coordinated market economies. This political economy approach offers a biased perception of the problems that policymakers have to face. According to a body of work in comparative economics that dates back to Shonfield (1965), policymakers should imitate "powerful" states like France and Japan in determining the actions that actors of the private sector should take to enhance the performance of the economy and in defining the incentives that would motivate them to do so (Johnson, 1982; Zysman, 1983). The ultimate objective was to persuade businesspeople to work with the government. However, Hall and Soskice contend that getting economic actors to work more effectively together is the key challenge that policymakers must overcome. As a

result, the economy is seen as a setting where individuals can hone their skills by finding more effective ways to coordinate their efforts. In specific circumstances, markets may offer this coordination; thus, policymakers' job and responsibility are to influence markets to enhance their performance. In other cases, businesses can successfully complete specific duties only by cooperating with others in a setting of strategic engagement. In such a situation, it is necessary to influence private sector actors to share information, strengthen their capacity to interact with one another in a credible manner, and alter their assumptions about what other actors will do in order to improve the equilibrium outcome that results from such interactions. In these circumstances, the state cannot simply tell actors what to do since it lacks the knowledge necessary to describe appropriate strategies, in addition to the fact that the results are too complex to be determined by regulation. The existence of properly constituted social groups, such as labor unions and business associations, which government authorities can support but not create, is a prerequisite for effective strategic coordination. Effective cooperation requires common knowledge, which can only be created by experience gathered through time, as shown by Culpepper (2001). As a result, pro-competitive policies are needed in liberal market economies where coordination is provided by market mechanisms to achieve better economic performance; however, in coordinated market economies, it may be possible to gain from policies that are intended to increase the capacity of actors in strategic coordination. Wood (2001) takes a step further in his studies by contending that political structures also affect how policies are carried out and implemented. In order to implement policies that attempt to increase firms' competencies, such as skill levels and technological potential, while attempting to meet their needs with some degree of precision, a considerable amount of information regarding firms' business operations and activities is needed. But even so, firms are reluctant to share this information with the government as states are strong and unpredictable players who can fail to comply with the agreements and use that information against the firms themselves. To summarize, information asymmetries, high transaction costs, and issues with time consistency must be addressed in policies intended to enhance the capacity of firms in strategic coordination. In solving these issues, coordinated market economies' governments benefit from powerful business associations and trade unions as, due to their independence from the state, the latter are more inclined to entrust them with the necessary private information for them to execute a policy successfully. Furthermore, because these associations are best positioned to exert control over their members, they can ensure coordination at costs of transaction which are lower than the ones the government could charge. By doing this, business associations enter into "implicit contracts" with the



government to carry out a policy, gaining more power and resources. The political structure is similarly of utmost significance. These implicit contracts will be signed by business associations only if the state's commitment to comply with them is demonstrated to be credible. This is most likely to happen when business organizations have enough institutional power to hold the state accountable for breaking the agreements. This power may be derived from the standing of business organizations within political parties, the existence of neocorporatist practices that allow for the punishment of noncompliance, or the existence of public policy procedures that are so decentralized as to grant producer groups entry points and veto power. It comes with no doubt that in order to mobilize the required delegates to threaten the government with sanctions, these groups must be sufficiently represented and powerful. As a result, measures that attempt to improve strategic coordination are more readily put into practice in a coordinated market economy and in a political system where industrial groups have great influence due to the way the system is structured. It is simpler for governments in liberal market economies, particularly those that follow the Westminster model, where power is centralized in the executive branch and business groups are given little structural sway, to enact market-oriented policies that do not compel companies to enter into relational contracts. Given that Liberal Market Economies rely on markets for coordination, deregulation frequently proves to be the most practical strategy to enhance such coordination. This way of approaching political economy also offers fresh viewpoints on social policy, highlighting how crucial it is for organizations and how important corporate relationships are to the welfare state's framework. Following the hypothesis according to which producers would be against such initiatives, social policy is thought as a response to demands made by trade unions and socialist parties. However, Mares (2001) and Estevez Abe et al. (2001) have demonstrated that social policies often receive positive consideration from industrial groups and provide essential support to particular economic plans and company strategies (Swenson 2002). We can expect liberal market economies and coordinated market economies to have different social policies given the differences encountered among business strategy in liberal and coordinated market economies. Social policies are frequently employed in CMEs to motivate employees to gain sector-specific skills by providing unemployment benefits with high replacement rates. In contrast, all LMEs are characterized by "liberal" welfare states, in which the prominent role of means-testing and low subsidies allow for fluid labor markets that firms rely on to manage their relationships with workers and encourage workers to acquire generic skills (Esping-Andersen 1990). More generally, the levels of resource specificity observed in various countries are conditioned by the political economy's characteristics (Alt et al., 1997).

While actors in liberal market economies should invest more in nonspecific resources, or that category of resources whose value can be realized even if they are used for other purposes, actors in coordinated market economies should be more willing to invest in specific and co-specific resources, which cannot be easily used for other purposes and whose return depends heavily on the active cooperation of others. In LMEs, due to more fluid markets, actors have more opportunities to change the use of their assets in search of the highest returns and are encouraged to invest in generic skills or multipurpose technologies. CMEs, on the other hand, provide more institutional support for the strategic interactions which are needed in order to realize the value of co-specific assets, in the form of both industry-specific training and R&D collaboration. Nowadays, all economies of rich and industrialized countries are more open than they were in the past, and they are also exposed to fierce international competition, which requires businesses to be highly innovative. Globalization (Berger and Dore, 1996; Keohane and Milner, 1996; Friedman, 1998) is the term used to describe these processes. Globalization, however, puts national institutions' ability to remain stable in the face of competition at risk. Hall and Soskice share the traditional view of globalization, which relies on three fundamental ideas to address the question of whether or not national institutional distinctions would continue to be significant or if competitive deregulation will bring all economies toward a single market model, and thus towards a unique form of capitalism. The first contends that businesses are roughly the same across all nations, whereas the second argues that business competitiveness is related to labor costs per unit, with the result that many companies outsource manufacturing activities in quest of lower labor costs. These assertions produce a rather specific, yet peculiar understanding of the political dynamic influenced by globalization. Entrepreneurs who are threatening to leave the economy put growing pressure on the states asking for regulations' reforms, usually in the form of lower taxes and labor expenses as well as the expansion of the domestic market through deregulation. To protect their members' salaries and benefits, trade unions and social democratic parties reject these policies. The final outcome depends on how much resistance workers and the left are able to put up against these reform proposals. However, as it is simpler for capital than labor to leave the national economy as a result of the growing international interdependence, the balance of forces is thought to have shifted in favor of the former. Therefore, this model foreshadows a significant, substantial, worldwide deregulation of economic institutions. Although far less optimistic in its implications than earlier ones which were based on the theories of industrialization, the mainstream view of globalization incorporates a "convergence hypothesis" of equal strength (Kerr et al. 1960; Graubard 1964).

Scholars who contend that the internalization of trade and finance is not as widespread and recent phenomenon as many believe or that countries are not as helpless as they seem in the face of these changes but, rather, have taken advantage of the justification of global pressure to pursue the reforms they wanted to enact are currently the main opponents to this perspective (Wade, 1996; Boyer, 1996; Cohen, 1996). The varieties of capitalism approach advanced and championed by Hall and Soskice in their "Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage" questions the traditional understanding of globalization. It can be summed up in two fundamental claims: a) The institutions producing institutional comparative advantage are not threatened by lower trade barriers and greater capital mobility. One of the standard implications of the comparative advantage theory is that specialization and the institutions that support it should be strengthened by globalization; b) the pressure to change institutions arises when the existent institutions are no longer able to provide the greatest comparative advantage; however, this is a typical consequence of technological advancement and preference variation. Therefore, as technology advances more quickly, the CME and LME models may merge, negating the benefits of long-term relational contracts. More frequently, it results in modifications to the current institutional setting. The conventional model is challenged by the varieties of capitalism approach. It implies that businesses aren't really the same everywhere. Instead, businesses in LMEs and CMEs create firm-specific strategies based on the institutions that support respectively market or strategic coordination. Consequently, businesses respond differently to the same challenges based on the type of economic environment they operate in (Knetter 1989). Additionally, this implies that companies do not always relocate their operations abroad where labor costs and costs of production are less expensive. As a matter of fact, they gain competitive advantages from the institutions in their country that encourage particular forms of coordination both between and within enterprises, and they will be hesitant to give these up in order to cut labor costs. It should go without saying that cross-border activity is an inevitable effect of international liberalization. To ensure the benefits provided by their institutional environment, multinationals are more likely to participate in a sort of institutional arbitrage, moving some activities to other nations, according to the theory of institutional comparative advantage found by Hall and Soskice. Multinationals may move some activities to Coordinated Market Economies to take advantage of the institutions' sensitivity to quality control and incremental innovation, or to Liberal Market Economies in order to gain access to institutional support for radical innovation. Such movements ought to strengthen rather than undermine the unique institutional frameworks of each country.

International liberalization has three different effects on national institutions when it does so, all of which serve to strengthen institutional comparative advantage:

- The abolishment of laws in favor of national monopolies;
- As technology advances and product market competition rises, businesses are put under increased pressure to cut costs and develop new products. As a result, institutions that produce comparative advantage are pushed to respond more quickly to the needs of businesses;
- The increased level of market openness may necessitate the creation of "interface" rules and protocols to interact with actors coming from various capitalist systems, such as, for instance, "interface" laws and regulations protecting minority shareholder rights and greater accounting transparency.

The German experience demonstrates, however, that businesses have benefited from having access to lower-cost loans without significantly deteriorating the relationship between managers and corporate boards. In this context, removing restrictions on behavior that would otherwise support institutions that provide comparative advantage is possible via lowering free trade and capital mobility barriers. Examples include regulations that allow for hostile takeovers, mandate competitive labor markets, and prohibit agreements between businesses that incentivize technology transfer when one side has the ability to sway the other. The most significant factor that, during the past 20 years, has made it harder for current institutional structures to continue to create comparative advantage is technological advancement. For instance, in liberal market economies like the United States and the United Kingdom, the rise of information technology has played a significant role in the Fordist production system becoming outmoded. Such a factor has prompted governments of the left and right to deregulate the labor market in these kinds of economies. Evidence does, however, appear to rule out any instances of LME and CME model convergence as a result of technological advancement. In general, the current institutional environment is constantly being adjusted. For instance, the German apprenticeship system has undergone significant reforms, allowing for faster program changes and the creation of new apprenticeships than in the past, while still allowing for training in industry-specific skills. Additionally, technological advancement should not necessarily be viewed as an exogenous factor. Both radical, high-risk sectors that favor LMEs and more gradual/incremental, lower-risk sectors that favor CMEs typically exist and coexist in the world of new technology. Germany has established a significant market for lower-risk platform technologies, although the United States and the United Kingdom have historically dominated the biotechnology sector. According to what political economy experts

Hall and Soskice contend, different political dynamics will exist in liberal and coordinated market economies because of the different objectives and interests the major economic actors have and the sources of collective action that are supported by the various national political systems. Business interests will probably exert pressure on governments to accomplish deregulation in LMEs since companies that coordinate their efforts primarily through the market can only become more skilled by fostering competition. Deregulation and a weakening of labor unions will be the outcomes. Instead, deregulation should be less of a priority for governments and industry associations in CMEs since it jeopardizes the institutional backing for strategic cooperation that underpins many of the nation's comparative advantages. As a result, political alliances between the various classes may form in these nations as businesses and workers who have strong interests in a particular regulatory area will work to safeguard those interests (Swenson 2002). The divergent interests of median voters further these processes. Median voters at the same time, are more likely to have made specific investments in particular skills in CMEs than in LMEs, and are, therefore, more likely to support labor market regulation (Iversen and Soskice 2001). Moreover, political systems in LMEs rely less on negotiation than those in CMEs as institutional change is more likely to be imposed than discussed when the election system is majoritarian, and governments are run by a legislative majority. Contrarily, in CMEs, negotiation frequently transforms into governance, reflecting the capacity for collective action of business groups; more proportional electoral systems are used, making coalition governments the norm; and social actors hold a privileged position in the creation of public policies. This analysis is supported by recent events. Labor unions are less powerful in liberal market economies with respect to coordinated market economies, where interclass alliances maintain wage coordination. Compared to the CMEs of northern Europe and East Asia, the LMEs have experienced far more widespread deregulation (Story and Walter 1997; King and Wood 1999). In the end, this is not unexpected. As shown by two centuries of commerce and international exchanges, nations often flourish by enhancing their institutional diversity rather than by becoming more alike. As national economies must adapt and adjust to new technology and economic interdependence, this perspective neglects the possibility of a full convergence between LMEs and CMEs but still, anticipates some adjustments in institutions and regulation. Consequently, it is helpful to look at how institutions affect the many ways businesses manage coordination issues that are essential to their unique competencies in order to develop new conceptual frameworks for the understanding of such adaptations. All industrialized economies are likely to have at least some degree of deregulation, which has some of the

following effects. On the one hand, the institutional reforms carried out in one area of the economy may spread to other areas. For instance, the deregulation of financial markets in CMEs may make it more challenging for businesses to offer long-term employment, ultimately implying a change in production methods (Aoki, 1994). On the other hand, institutional complementarities act as a deterrent to significant change. Businesses may work to maintain current arrangements in one area of the economy in order to preserve significant and productive synergies with other institutions (Thelen, 1999). Analyzing the expected stances of various countries in international negotiations over economic adjustment is also important. States tend to choose international systems that preserve the coordination typical of their own economies and broaden the application of their enterprises' institutional comparative advantages, as demonstrated by Fioretos (2001). The market-oriented international agreements that governments in liberal market economies frequently support are generally less popular within coordinated market economies. This was made clear during the recent European Union negotiations on competition policy and corporate governance regulation. However, there is a fundamental asymmetry in this conflict between market-oriented policies and those in favor of strategic coordination. Countries find it easier to put into practice policies that support market competition than those that support strategic cooperation for the reasons mentioned above. Furthermore, to destroy institutional support for strategic coordination is less challenging than it is to build it; in fact, for such coordination to be successful, it calls for not only the right policies but also social structures, the creation of which may take decades. It follows that the tendency of modern adjustment procedures to be liberal is not surprising. In conclusion, the “varieties of capitalism” approach enables us to comprehend both the processes by which national political economies change and significant aspects of similarity and difference between countries. It presents a study agenda that is still at its initial stage but has the potential to improve our comprehension of the difficulties that political economies are currently facing.

A further classification of the various forms of capitalism comes from the contribution of a group of economists who have recently identified four distinct types of capitalism based on the role of entrepreneurship, which is the process of starting businesses, in developing new technologies, driving innovation and the institutional setting in which new ideas are implemented to encourage economic growth (Baumol, Litan, and Schramm 2007).

In state-guided capitalism, the State (government) gets to decide which sectors will grow as it plays a major role in guiding the economy. This was the situation in post-World War II South Korea, and it is still the case in China, where, despite the shift from a planned to a "market"

economy, the government maintains a significant controlling influence over the economy, primarily through its presence in the banking system. On the one side, state intervention can help boost economic growth. However, historical evidence suggests that government intervention, which can be a powerful stimulus at the outset of an economy, is more likely to stifle long-term growth due to the distortions created by government when allocating or guiding capital. This latter issue becomes more pressing as an economy approaches the technological frontier and authorities must start figuring out how to develop and commercialize brand-new products, services, and processes. Initially driven by a desire to promote growth, this type of capitalism has several drawbacks, including excessive investment, selecting the wrong winners, susceptibility to corruption, and difficulty withdrawing support when it is no longer needed.

Oligarchic capitalism pursues the protection and empowerment of a small percentage of the population. Economic growth is not a primary goal, and countries of this sort register high levels of inequality and corruption. There have been and continue to exist places where a significant portion of the plant and equipment that composes the means of production is in private hands. In these cases, the owners of that capital are extremely few, usually a few prosperous and powerful families, also referred to as oligarchs, who maintain effective control over the majority of their economy's activities and who determine a country's economic policy. The most notable examples of oligarchic capitalism are found in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Russia. Typically, the large proportion of the population in this type of economy is kept in poverty, with few chances for individual advancement. Currently, societies that fall under the umbrella of oligarchic capitalism are marked by extremely modest or negative economic growth, owing in large part to the oligarchs' resistance to change, lest it threaten their supremacy.

Big-firm capitalism (also defined oligopolistic) exploits and benefits from economies of scale. This type of capitalism is necessary for the mass production of products. Government policy is restrained in some societies, and most of the economy's productive capital stock is in the hands of private owners. In the meantime, oligopolistic industries, within which a small number of very big firms own a dominant share of production, account for a significant portion of the country's economic activity. The contemporary oligopoly firm can be of very large dimensions, with outputs nearly equivalent to the GDP of a small but wealthy nation. These businesses are not new, and their methods are well-established. Despite this, it is noteworthy to mention that the size and long history of these firms do not guarantee their ongoing success, as demonstrated by the recent failure and disappearance of a number of such

firms. The experience of large-firm-dominated economies suggests that while this arrangement does not preclude growth, it does prevent that society from being at the technological frontier becoming a productive innovation leader. Thus, such giant corporations, as they did in Japan after WWII, play an important role in boosting productivity and growth. This process works best in a hybrid economic arrangement that includes oligopolistic firms as well as entrepreneurial capitalists.

Entrepreneurial capitalism might be the oldest form of capitalism. In such economies, small firms are predominant and are the first to introduce most of the newest technologies and innovations. It results in technological improvements and innovations such as the telephone, PCs and the automobile. Individuals and new businesses are usually the source of these innovations. A capitalism of this kind, however, requires large corporations to mass-produce and market new products, therefore the best option would be that of merging big-firm and entrepreneurial forms of capitalism together. This type of mixed capitalism is more prevalent in the United States than in any other country (Baumol, William J., Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, 2007).

The mixed entrepreneurial-oligopolistic economy merges entrepreneurial and big-firm varieties of capitalism. No economy today is wholly entrepreneurial in configuration. Entrepreneurial firms have lived side by side with large oligopolistic businesses in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere since the late nineteenth century. Although there is some competition between the two, evidence highlights that market forces have caused these two types of firms to specialize and, as a result, undertake different stages of the innovation process. Historically, radical inventions and significant breakthroughs are more likely to be produced by smaller and younger entrepreneurial firms. Large corporations, on the other hand, frequently obtain such new innovations through purchase or acquisition of intellectual property rights. Both of these specialized activities have given significant contributions to the growth of the economy. The rate of technological progress, and therefore economic growth, would be far slower if entrepreneurial organizations did not provide breakthrough ideas. However, most innovative products and services could not be successfully commercialized, or their broad economic benefits realized without the incremental refinements and improvements of entrepreneurial innovations, typically provided by larger, established companies (Baumol, William J., Robert E. Litan, and Carl J. Schramm, 2007).



### **3. Can capitalism coexist with Mindfulness?**

Although this is a quite interesting question to be answered, it is at the same time quite evident how capitalism coexists with mindfulness as we live in a society that, as explored in the previous paragraph of this chapter, revolves around different varieties of capitalism. In some cases, capitalism presents itself as a political system in which profit maximization is the ultimate aim of many companies and in which private actors own and control property in accord with their interests, the dynamics of demand and supply freely set prices in markets in a way that can serve the best interests of society. But even though the one just described is the capitalism we all have always heard of, it is important to remember that the final object of capitalism is not always the pursuit of money and wealth, but many other (such as progress, human development, technological advancement) may be the achievements to tick off the list besides profit maximization due to the fact that no single form of capitalism predominates, yet several coexist. Along with capitalism, mindfulness programs aiming at the improvement of employees' well-being as a means to improve their productivity and creativity for the sake of the company itself are being and have, in recent years, been implemented within organizations. Moreover, the rising competition, the struggle to gather a competitive advantage, alongside the desire of firms to attract highly-skilled human capital, long working hours, work overloads, high demands etc. are putting employers and more than others employees under great pressure which translates in a continuously sharp increase in stress levels. But even if companies were interested in achieving a competitive advantage by hiring low-skilled human capital or were trying to promote cost-reduction programs through layoffs in order to cut costs and expenses, this would leave the organization with a mismatch between the amount of work to be done and the number of workers available. As a consequence, workloads would become particularly heavier and employees would be forced to work longer hours which, in the end, would result in increased work-related stress. It is under such circumstances that organizations decide to offer their workforce mindfulness programs and trainings like the MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction) Protocol for instance, in order to cope with, reduce or at least keep levels of work-related stress amongst people working inside the company under control. But instead of focusing on this banal, yet obvious in its answer question, I believe we should direct our attention toward a more complex, rather inclusive and comprehensive type of matter: with the premise that capitalism definitely can and does coexist with mindfulness, can we match mindfulness practices to specific varieties of capitalism in particular? Why?

Based on my research, given the abundance of information and the vast literature coming from American institutions, universities or authors, and also considering the fact that most of the analyzed scientific articles focus on the United States, I assume that the majority of mindfulness interventions have been or are to be carried out in this country. In particular, the area of the Silicon Valley which is home to many global technology colossal companies such as Facebook, Apple and Google for instance and to many start-ups is, based on the research I conducted and according to what emerges from more than half of the articles collected in this work, one of the most involved in the promotion of these kinds of wellness programs as technology companies, being required to follow and stick to the fast-paced, constantly changing technological progress, may have to overcome daily challenges, fulfill increasing job demands and shape to be compliant with the forms technological advancement takes on (Christian Greiser, Jan-Philipp Martini, and Nicole Meissner, 2018; Minoo Talebi Ashoori, 2020; Andy Lee, 2012; Boyce, B., 2009; Der Hovanesian, M., 2003; Duerr, M., 2004; David S. Karlin., 2018; Purser, R. E., 2018; Aidan Serrano., 2020; Gelles, D., 2016; Schaufenbuel, K., 2014; Duffy J., 2020; Winter T., 2016; LinkedIn, 2015; ProQuest., 2015).

In addition, the same body of literature sheds light on the use of mindfulness in companies and yet, the most relevant and significant case studies reported in the literature are all from American or Anglo-Saxon companies; among the big businesses involved in mindfulness we find Google, General Mills, Intel, Aetna, Goldman Sachs, AstraZeneca, Fidelity Investments and Nike (Yours App, 2022) with companies like Ford, American Express and LinkedIn offering employee-training sessions on a regular basis (Zuckerman A., 2020). Evidence provided also in the previous chapters of the present thesis demonstrate that the meditation market is booming especially in the US where it is expected to grow in revenue by 11.4%, up to 2.08 billion dollars this year (Zuckerman A., 2020) thanks to the recent upsurge of mindfulness apps which are gaining increasing popularity. Another reason why this assumption might contain a kernel of truth needs to be found in the most widespread form of organization in the US which is the corporation.

The United States marketplace is dominated by these giant corporations who, being legal entities, which are separate and distinct from their owners (Team, T. I., 2022), base their struggle for power on competition. Supporting evidence from paragraph 1.2 on the varieties of capitalism demonstrates that whilst in coordinated market economies collaboration prevails, in liberal market economies such as the United States, competition is strong and fierce amongst companies. Because of this, but also because of the presence of fluid and volatile markets, capital mobility and competitive market relations, liberal market economies might be

more in need of consistent mindfulness interventions with respect to coordinated market economies which are instead characterized by information sharing, behavior monitoring, sanctions for the defection from cooperative efforts, thus foster a more collaborative kind of work environment which is more likely to generate less stress and, as a consequence, programs to reduce work-related issues and burdens are less likely to be necessary.

As we have seen in chapter 2, one of the sources of stress is the degree to which a company grants its employees the right to take part in the decision-making regarding their job tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, as the organizational structure of many firms in CMEs assumes the form of a network, there is a structural tendency to encourage a consensual, highly decentralized kind of decision-making process which in turn gives workers more freedom to express their ideas and the possibility to feel part of the organization as a whole. To the contrary, in LMEs, decision-making is centralized, people outside top management are not allowed to make choices concerning their jobs, thus it is in such work contexts that work-related stress arises and needs to be controlled; yet, this further supports how countries like the apparently strong, fierce and global leader United States might be hiding some weaknesses in terms of employees' well-being. Additionally, mindfulness programs might be implemented more in those countries, and specifically businesses, in which employers are not able to give employees the right tools and space to express their skills and capabilities at best and in those contexts in which firms are not interested in creating a corporate culture and community which could help workers integrate and become more engaged.

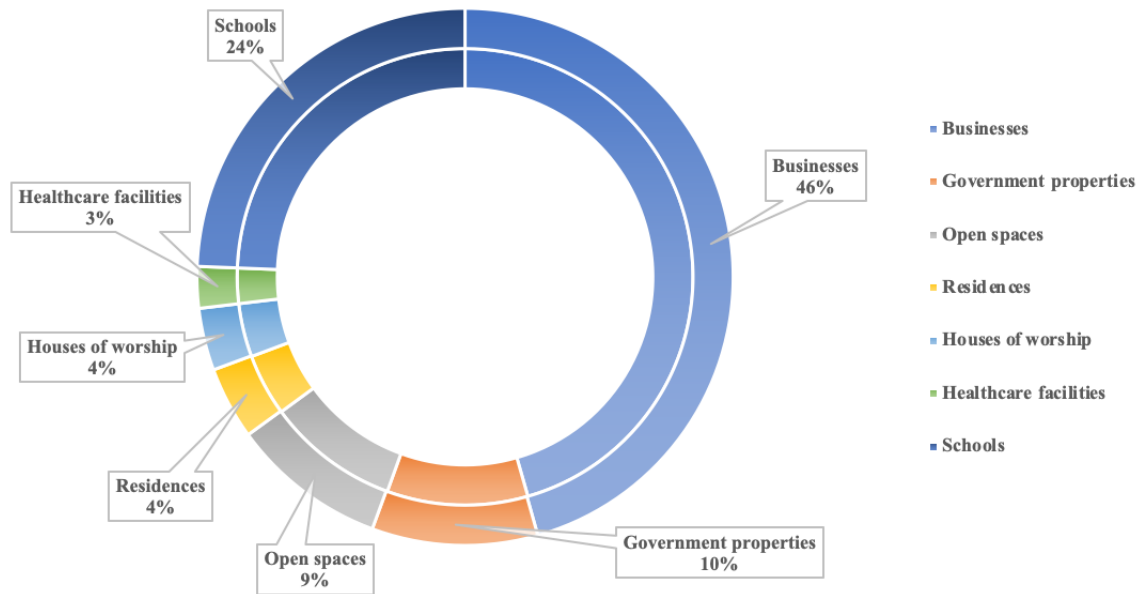
Other than work-related sources of stress, people in America might feel stressed and report feelings of exhaustion and anxiety because of some major and historically ongoing diffused social issues such as the use of firearms and racial disparities. The first is in fact a right of US citizens defended by the Second Amendment to the Constitution which reads "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (Congress.gov). Despite the advantages having the right to bear guns may entail, like using them as a tool for self-defense purposes which is the first thing that comes to my mind, though it also implies many downsides.

According to the Mass Shooting Tracker in fact, there were 372 mass shootings in the US in 2015 with a total of 475 casualties and approximately 1870 wounded (Gun Violence Archive, 2015). A mass shooting is defined by the BBC as a single shooting incident which kills or injures four or more people, including the assailant (BBC, 2016). In order to understand the dimension of the gun violence phenomenon, the upcoming statistics are quite useful. According to the Gun Violence Archive for instance, of all the shooting incidents occurred in

the US, around 13,286 people were killed by firearms in 2015 and 26,819 were injured (Gun Violence Archive, 2022). If we were to compare the number of gun murders per capita in the US with that of other countries, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that in 2012 it was nearly 30 times higher than that in the UK. Additionally, the 60% of all the murders that took place on the US soil in 2012 was caused by firearms compared with 31% in Canada, 18.2% in Australia, and just 10% in the UK (United Nations, n.d.). In recent years, the situation has not improved unfortunately as in 2019, 39,707 people died from firearms in the US, 60% of which committed suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2018). In numbers, 14,861 people in the U.S. died from firearm homicide, accounting for 37% of total deaths from firearms, whereas 23,941 people in the U.S. used guns to commit suicide, thus firearms became the means in approximately half of suicides nationwide. The gun violence phenomenon in America took on huge proportions to the point that in 2012, the government spent more than 229 billion dollars on gun injuries which is equal to about 1.4% of the country's GDP (Follman M, Lurie J, Lee J, West J., 2015). Nowadays, guns are still a big deal as 31% of all households in the U.S. have firearms, and 22% of American adults personally own at least one firearm (Smith TW, Son J., 2015) and this is probably the reason why the U.S. has relatively low rates of assaultive violence but high firearm mortality rates with respect to other industrialized nations (Wintemute GJ., 2015).

Overall since 2006, firearm homicides in the U.S. have decreased, but the number of firearm suicides has increased by a similar amount which could eventually turn into a quest for more mindfulness intervention (Wintemute GJ., 2015). The fact that mass shootings and guns are largely an American phenomenon is further demonstrated by the CNN which states that from 1966 to 2012, nearly a third of the world's mass shootings took place within US borders. A study conducted in 2016 analyzed 292 incidents in which four or more people lost their lives. It emerged that 90 of them occurred in America. While the United States has about 5% of the world's population, it counted 31% of all public mass shootings (Willingham, A. J., & Ahmed, S., 2017). Based on what the CNN has published regarding a study of active shooter incidents in the United States between 2000 and 2013 conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, people have a greater chance of dying in mass shootings if they're at school or place of business as, according to FBI data from 2013, incidents in schools and businesses represent 7 out of 10 active shootings (U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016).

**ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS - WHERE YOU ARE MOST AT RISK**  
(Number of incidents 2000 - 2013)



Based on these figures, it is evident that employees might experience increased levels of work-related stress due to the diffusion of firearms in the country and also because of the likelihood, which is apparently consistent and concrete, of a mass shooting or shooting to happen within a company or business environment.

According to a 2007 report by the Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey, Americans own about 270 million guns, thus civilians in the United States own more guns than citizens of any other country. That's enough to arm every adult in the US and still have some weapons left over. This makes America the No. 1 country in firearms per capita. Also, in more than half the American mass shooting episodes, the shooter had more than one firearm whereas in global incidents, the shooter typically had only one gun (Cambridge University Press, 2007). According to a Pew study of 2017, 74% of gun owners say this right is essential to their freedom witnessing the great importance US citizens attach to the right to hold and keep arms (Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., Igielnik, R., Oliphant, J. B., & Brown, A., 2017). As shown by the above-displayed data, gun violence is a major problem in the United States as well as the key driver of the rise in violent crime across the nation (Eugenio Weigend Vargas, 2022). Moreover, it has some significant connections with the problem of racial disparities as gun violence has a disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities and is highly concentrated in a restricted number of neighborhoods that have historically been racially segregated and provided with insufficient resources. This is the result of a combination of systemic racial inequities, weak gun laws and a history of disinvestment in public

infrastructure and services in the communities of color most affected by gun violence. As a matter of fact, nowadays gun homicides are on the rise in the United States, with young Black and brown people experiencing the highest rates. Supporting evidence shows that in 2020, 12,179 Black Americans were killed with guns, compared to 7,286 white Americans (Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). What is worth mentioning though is that whilst Black Americans made up 12.5 percent of the overall U.S. population that year, they were the victims in 61 percent of all gun homicides (Center for American Progress analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Numbers from official sources over decades of time prove that Black Americans are 10 times more likely than white Americans to die by gun homicide (Everytown for Gun Safety) as well as three times more likely than white Americans to be fatally shot by police (Gabriel L. Schwartz and Jaquelyn L. Jahn, 2020). American Indian and Alaska Native women are killed by intimate partners at a rate of 4.3 per 100,000, compared with 1.5 per 100,000 for white women (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 2018). Guns are used in more than half of all homicides of women and are disproportionately used against Black women (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 2018).

This forces us to study how and to what extent racial inequality, defined by Counselor for Racial Equity Janis Bowdler and Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy Benjamin Harris as the unequal distribution of resources, power, and economic opportunity across race in a society (Bowdler, J., & Harris, B., 2022) and systemic racism which according to Glenn Harris, president of Race Forward is “the complex interaction of culture, policy and institutions that holds in place the outcomes we see in our lives” are spread throughout the United States (Quarshie, M., Yancey-Bragg, N., Godlasky, A., Sargent, J., & Bravo, V., 2020).

Although the debate on racial inequality in the United States is often concerned with economic inequality, racial inequality can also manifest itself in many ways that both alone and together influence the well-being of all Americans. Harris in fact, affirms that systemic racism generates disparities in several “success indicators” such as health, education, employment, wealth, housing, political representation and criminal justice among the others (Quarshie, M., Yancey-Bragg, N., Godlasky, A., Sargent, J., & Bravo, V., 2020; Shapiro, Thomas M., 2004; Shayanne Gal, A. K., 2020).

The following section concentrates on data provided by a large and significant body of literature that show off how black people in the United States have long faced persistent inequality as a result of centuries of racism, discrimination, and the long-lasting effects of

slavery that have produced circumstances that make it extremely difficult for Black Americans to advance (Quarshie, M., Yancey-Bragg, N., Godlasky, A., Sergent, J., & Bravo, V., 2020). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, disparities are a major problem in the workforce, with black people who, in year 2020, not only registered an unemployment rate which was higher than the average, accounting for 16.8% of the total unemployed population, but also they were frequently left out of professional and managerial jobs. Many black workers state to have endured episodes of racism in the workplace and only four of Fortune 500 CEOs are Black corporate leaders. This has also a significant impact on income inequality between racial groups. Considering income, based on a study conducted by the Census Bureau, from 1987 to 2017, black median household income remained the lowest with an average value equal to 40,258 dollars, below that of any other country worldwide. As a consequence, black poverty rate more than doubles white poverty rate with 21,2% of black people being in poverty compared to just 8,7% of white citizens undergoing difficult financial situations.

According to the US Census Bureau, black people have the highest poverty rate followed by hispanic (18,3%), all the other races (12,3%) and Asians (10%). It is peculiar to notice that the black poverty rate almost doubles that of the other races altogether. There is also a multitude of episodes of inequality in terms of criminal justice, in fact according to a study from the University of Michigan, Rutgers University and Washington University, black men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men. With black people accounting for the 13% of the total US population, 475,900 of them are incarcerated in federal and state prisons compared to just 436,500 white people which account for 61% of the total population becoming inmates (Quarshie, M., Yancey-Bragg, N., Godlasky, A., Sergent, J., & Bravo, V., 2020).

All the above-mentioned and explored data demonstrate the impact social issues can have on people's lives and happiness making the United States a country that might be in need of mindfulness interventions more than any other nation in the world both due to its constitutional right to keep and bear arms that are a source of social concern and anxiety and because of racial inequalities that do not guarantee citizens equal rights.

Furthermore, in the United States there is probably also a greater need for mindfulness because in LMEs the focus seems to be profit-oriented, when instead attention and focus should be placed on creating a community by improving the work environment. Once the latter is improved, then a profit increase will result, but profit maximization should never be perceived as the final end. In liberal market economies, high levels of turnover are registered

as companies look for generic skills and aim to employ people for short periods of time, there is no investment in the creation of social bonds and relationships, people are just exploited in the short-term. Also, the fact that in LMEs a larger portion of the adult population is employed on corporate payrolls, while income inequality is high, withstands what I stated above and that is that there will probably be a greater need for mindfulness intervention in liberal market economies since unlike CMEs, they do not have an equal distribution of income and work longer hours which results in an increase or at least greater levels of work-related stress.

Evidence also proves that political systems in LMEs are less reliant upon negotiation with respect to CMEs and this consists of another possible reason why mindfulness could be more present and required in liberal market economies. Thus, from the information I collected and theoretically speaking, companies in liberal market economies such as Israel, Ireland, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom might be needing more mindfulness-based interventions to manage levels of work-related stress if compared to countries like Germany, South Korea, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Finland, and Norway which are classified as coordinated market economies. A further example I would like to provide is the case of China. As we all may know, China shares no similarities with the US except for the power both these two countries have and the strong influence they exert globally. Even though China has shifted from a planned economy towards a more market-oriented economy, the Chinese government still controls a large portion of the country's economy with power and decision-making being highly centralized and still much to do in terms of human and social development. As a result, based on what previously mentioned, China would share with the United States the necessity to adopt and implement mindfulness-based programs within its companies. This hypothesis could be also reflected in the fact that Chinese employees are subject to long working hours, labor exploitation, high job demands, repetitive and monotonous tasks which eventually leads to demotivation, high pressure and excessive workloads to such an extent that symptoms of anxiety, stress and illness are on the rise. As a matter of fact, though we are used to think of China as a powerful global leader who has been on the technological frontier for nearly three decades now and who has made major progresses since the ascent to power of President Deng Xiaoping, it still lags behind in terms of human development and enforcement of laws regulating working conditions. Despite China's "996 work culture" according to which people work from 9am to 9pm six days a week, the Chinese government recalled companies that such a work schedule is illegal. In a joint statement issued in 2021, China's top court and



labor ministry documented ten labor-related court decisions, many of which involved workers being forced to work overtime. The disputes, which covered various scenarios across a wide range of sectors warned that “Legally, workers have the right to corresponding compensation and rest times or holidays. Complying with national working hours is the obligation of employers”. China’s labor laws in fact, straightforwardly affirm that a standard workday is eight hours-long and Chinese workers must receive overtime pay for hours worked beyond 44 in a week. However, employees in many of the country's largest businesses, particularly in the thriving tech sector, frequently work far longer hours and are not always paid off. But even with employees trying to fight back in order to get better working conditions, the “996 culture” has not been abrogated by the government, which instead decided to adopt a hands-off approach and this may be because, like it or not, this same work ethic has been recognized as the driving force behind the success of some of these companies, many of which have become incredibly popular and successful on the international scene. But employees’ anger must now be handled and a change in the policies that govern the country is needed. As stated by Dr Jenny Chan from Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Chinese society is at a crossroad and officials must immediately address these problems, especially after some major incidents that occurred in 2021. Two employees of the e-commerce platform Pinduoduo died weeks apart: one collapsed on the way home after working extra hours, and the other committed suicide. In January of the same year, a food delivery driver set himself on fire over being denied \$770 (£559) in unpaid wages, just one month after another worker died while delivering meals for online platform Ele.me.

Although it is unclear whether these incidents were directly caused by overwork, outraged internet users debated 996 culture as well as the “dark side” of working at some of the country's most prestigious companies. Moreover, it’s not as we might think that blue collars are more likely to work overtime than businessmen since Dr Song Zhaoli, of the National University of Singapore stated that "Whether it's the knowledge workers in internet businesses or the blue-collar workers at delivery platforms both employ millions of workers, and many are most likely working 996 hours” (Yip W., 2021). The trend on working hours seems not to be improving as, according to CEIC Data, an ISI Emerging Markets Group Company providing Macro and Microeconomic data, Chinese people were reported to work 48 hours per week in July this year which records an increase in working hours compared to the 47, 7 weekly average hours of work for June 2022. This number was only surpassed by an all-time high record registered in October 2021 when workers were employed for 48, 6 hours per week on average (CEIC, 2022).

Some specific sectors of the economy such as sports shoe factories and the toy industry are particularly hit by these severe working conditions. As reported by an investigation published on the CNBC, Chinese factory workers producing toys for Hasbro, Disney, and Mattel were exposed to "nightmare" working conditions before Christmas in 2018. During these inspections, undercover investigators were sent to four factories that produced toys to be sold at international retailers like Walmart, Costco, Target and others. They discovered serious violations at the factories that put workers in danger. Employees in fact, worked up to 175 overtime hours per month during peak production season which is way beyond the limit of 36 hours of overtime work per month imposed by the Chinese labor law. However, the report says that companies are able to circumvent existing legislation as factories frequently ask local governments to implement a "comprehensive working hour scheme". Concerning safety regulations and protection devices, workers were also not receiving the legally required 24-hour safety training prior to starting work, thus they were unaware of how to protect themselves from toxic substances. Furthermore, considering living standards, investigators also discovered that workers were forced to sign blank employment contracts and were given substandard living conditions, including housing eight people in one room with unhygienic facilities and no access to hot water (Taylor C., 2018). These data all provide evidence of the massive improvements China still has to do in terms of human development and labor laws, despite its establishment and recognition as a world power.

Moreover, while China is a declared, unitary, former socialist, communist and one-party Republic entailing some subtle autocratic features (EMBASSY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK, 2011), America is a living example of federalism in which politics function within a framework of a constitutional federal republic and presidential system with various levels and branches of power dominated by a two-party system (Wikimedia Foundation, 2022). Hence, despite having no thing in common, starting from the political system, the two superpowers appear to share the need for a greater mindfulness intervention in the workplace in order to monitor and deal with employee well-being.

Furthermore, it would be appropriate to analyze whether mindfulness is an individual choice or a collective kind of decision, in other words, it would be interesting to understand if promoting mindfulness programs and implementing mindfulness training in the workplace is a responsibility of the individual who has to take care of its own burdens or of the company that is held responsible for the well-being of its own employees. And again, is mindfulness offering companies a chance to redeem themselves, suggesting that firms rethink their current

policies to develop new ones in order not to be the cause of employees' work-related stress in the first place? Should companies adopt and implement new strategies and policies which aim to create new and better working environments, in which collaboration prevails over competition and in which sources of stress are managed in a way that prevents employees and workers from experiencing burnout?

From my point of view, based on the analysis I hereby carried out, companies should, or at least, could make an effort in trying to develop new policies aimed at improving all the factors such as for example, job control, time management, workloads, working hours, home-work relationship that represent a possible future source of stress if not managed properly instead of implementing mindfulness programs to deal with rising stress and health issues just after having created it. In this sense, some countries are already putting in action this type of early move to prevent employees from experiencing fatigue, anxiety and ultimately stress in the workplace. The idea behind this business strategy that of working four days a week, while maintaining the same pay level and earning the same benefits, but with the same workload. By so doing, companies would be able to shorten their workweek as a need to rethink the significance and value of workplace flexibility and benefits. Being considered the future of employees' work-life balance and productivity, when implemented, the 4-days' workweek seems to be registering increased worker satisfaction, and improvements in productivity that ultimately translates into a better overall performance of the company adopting it. In fact, trade unions across the world are pushing governments to embrace the four-day working week. Amongst the countries in favor of it, some of them have already experienced or are currently trying this business strategy out (Joly J., 2022).

Belgium for instance, this year have earned the right to work a full week in just four days with no loss of salary. Employees will choose between working four or five days per week, but this doesn't imply they will work less. According to Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo's words, "the goal is to give people and companies more freedom to arrange their work time" hoping that it will be helpful to make Belgium's rigid labor market more flexible and easier for people to combine personal life with career. The downsides of this are that some full-time workers will be working very late if they decide to work four days, while others, such as shift workers for instance, won't have the option of that flexibility (Bateman T., 2022). The United Kingdom has launched a six-month pilot program in which employees are expected to follow the "100:80:100 model" to explore the effects of shorter working hours on business productivity and employee well-being, and the impact on the environment and gender equality. "100:80:100 model" stands for 100% of the pay for 80% of the time in exchange for

a commitment to maintain at least 100% productivity (Hurst L., 2022). Similarly, Scotland and Wales are considering trials. In particular, a government trial is planning to start in 2023 in Scotland according to which employees will experience a 20% reduction in working hours but will suffer no loss in compensation and the respondents to the initiative declared the program would improve their health and happiness (Joly J., 2022). Between 2015 and 2019, Iceland conducted the world's largest pilot of a 35-36-hour workweek (a reduction from the traditional 40-hour workweek) with no calls for a corresponding pay cut. The test phase involved approximately 2,500 people and results were examined for quality control by the British think tank Autonomy and the Icelandic non-profit Association for Sustainability and Democracy (ALDA). Researchers deemed the pilot a huge success, and Icelandic trade unions negotiated a reduction in working hours. The study also resulted in a significant change in Iceland, with nearly 90% of the working population now having reduced hours as a result of it. Researchers discovered that workers' levels of stress and burnout decreased, and that life-work balance improved. Despite the overwhelming outcomes, not every government shared Iceland's success with the four-day work week (Bateman T., 2022). A four-day work week with full salary was tested in Sweden in 2015, obtaining mixed results. Labor unions proposed to try six-hour workdays rather than eight-hour ones without losing pay, but not everyone was happy about spending money on the trial. Even left-wing parties believed that implementing this on a large scale would have been prohibitively expensive. However, positive results were observed in the orthopedics unit of a university hospital, which switched 80 nurses and doctors to a six-hour workday and hired new staff to compensate for the lost time. The medical staff responded positively, but the experiment was heavily criticized and not renewed. Some companies however, like Toyota who has been implementing this business strategy for 10 years now, decided to keep reduced hours for their workforce (Joly J., 2022). Germany has one of Europe's shortest average working weeks. The average working week in fact, as per the World Economic Forum (WEF), is 34.2 hours (Edmond C., 2020). Nonetheless, trade unions are asking for even more reduced working hours, arguing that it would help retain jobs and avoid layoffs. As shown in a Forsa poll, 71% of German workers would like the option of working only four days per week. Even though almost three-quarters of the people surveyed said they support a four-day week, and more than two-thirds of employers agreed with this, it remains to be seen whether such a measure will be put in place or discussed. Up to this point, only smaller start-ups have experimented with a shorter work week. To the contrary, in countries such as Japan, big corporations are the ones experimenting with a shorter work week, in line with the Japanese government's announcement in 2021 of a

national plan to enhance work-life balance. Many are the reasons why this could be beneficial to the country, where overwork is a leading cause of death. Employees who work long hours are more likely to become ill or commit suicide as a result of their workload. Microsoft experimented with the model in 2019 by giving employees three-day weekends for a month. The change increased productivity by 40% and did result in more efficient work. Following tech giant Microsoft' lead, Spain is giving around 6 thousand employees of 200 between small and medium enterprises the possibility to extend their weekend by one day. At the same time, Más País, a small left-wing party, announced earlier this year that the government had agreed to start a modest pilot program of a four-day working week for companies that are interested in the idea.

Managing Director of Unilever New Zealand, Nick Bangs stated "Our goal is to measure performance on output, not time. We believe the old ways of working are outdated and no longer fit for purpose". Thus, in New Zealand, 81 Unilever employees are currently participating in a year-long trial of a four-day workweek at full pay, and, if the experiment turns out to be successful, it will surely be spread to other countries.

Coming to the experience of the United States, based on a survey conducted by cloud-software vendor Qualtrics, 92% of US workers support a shorter workweek, even if it implies working longer hours. The perceived benefits, according to the employees polled, were improved mental health and higher productivity. Three out of every four employees (74%) believe they could complete the same amount of work in four days, but the majority (72%) believes they would have to overwork themselves. Following COVID-19, 41% of Canadian employers are evaluating alternative hybrid schedules and new work styles, according to research from global employment agency Indeed. According to Indeed's survey of 1,000 Canadian employers of office workers, 51% of big companies with more than 500 employees are "likely to implement 4-day workweeks." In comparison, 63% of medium-sized businesses with one hundred to five-hundred employees maximum say they'd be willing to adopt a shorter workweek. According to a recent Maru Public Opinion report, the most of Canadian full-time workers (79%) are ready to reduce their five-day workweek to four days.

Generally speaking, the four-day workweek appears to be gaining popularity around the world, though whether governments will fully embrace the concept remains to be seen (Joly J., 2022).

Furthermore, companies should or again, could focus on the development of new policies aiming to reduce workloads, working hours, ameliorate working conditions, enhance collaboration, treat employees with respect, get workers involved in decision-making

processes, distribute income levels more equally, hire people for the skills and capabilities they are in possess of and are able to offer the company in order to improve engagement levels, reduce rates of absenteeism by making employees thrive and be productive at work, enhance well-being allowing for the achievement of work-life balance, happiness and ultimately to make them feel part of the organization that would increase commitment and sense of belonging. All these actions, if combined, could lead to an improved work environment which in turn could result into an increased company's performance in social, political, well-being and economic terms. The question I am asking myself and that most of all remains unanswered is whether the countries in which these mindfulness meditation practices have originated, thus East Asian countries have accepted or not their transformation and use in such a context which is completely different from the one they were born and developed for. In other words, how do East Asian countries and people view the adoption of mindfulness to be implemented in Western countries and specifically in the world of business as it was originally thought as a discipline of the mind and conceived for introspective purposes?

## **Chapter 5 - Case studies**

Compared to the past, over time, the world of business and workplaces have undergone major transformations; this has caused exponential growth in factors such as pressure toward results, workloads, competitiveness, uncertainty, and complexity. This set of factors has led to increased stress within organizations as well as in individuals themselves. As a result, cases of burnout and occupational diseases related to higher levels of work-related stress have been on the rise.

Following these profound and substantial changes, a number of concepts, previously used in different contexts and for diverse purposes, such as resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, soft skills, etc., have started to be applied to and employed in the corporate environments across the globe.

In this way, people came to realize that any company is primarily made up of human capital, consequently deeming the old models of leadership inadequate and harmful for achieving the goals businesses now have in their corporate agendas.

Under such circumstances, more and more cases of virtuous companies and managers who have successfully applied mindfulness-based models to economics have emerged.

### **1. Niccolò Branca's case study**

In the case of “Fratelli Branca Distillerie”, an Italian company active in the production and distribution of alcoholic beverages founded in Milan by Bernardino Branca in 1845, entrepreneur Niccolò Branca has successfully implemented a new leadership model through a long journey of self-knowledge and self-awareness.

#### **1.1 From manager to mindful leader**

This case builds upon a path of personal awareness and meditation. Within his book titled “Economia della Consapevolezza: coscienza, interdependenza, sostenibilità”, Niccolò Branca refers many times to the concept of mindfulness economics, which recalls a possible integration of self-awareness within the economic sphere.

The author himself defines it as "a model of economic development in which to exploit the consciousness and self-awareness gathered through meditation to create a profit that has at its base and as its end happiness and the improvement of the living conditions of all the people involved in the production process."

In fact, if we were asked to think about the origin of the word “economy”, which is composed of two Greek words, namely oikos (inhabit) and nomos (norm, rule), we could see how the word itself suggests us the configuration and meaning of awareness within the economic realm, in that by the word “economy” we mean feeling in harmony with ourselves and our surroundings.

Therefore, Branca talking about mindfulness economics refers to acting in an all-round ethical manner, that is, to pursue growth that is and has to be sustainable over time. In this perspective, profit is observed as a form of energy that by spreading outward is given back to people and the community at large.

What follows is what has been achieved concretely by and within the Branca group. These include the creation of a code of ethics to be shared with customers and suppliers, the establishment of production facilities in Italy to the disadvantage of delocalization, the preparation of an environmental balance sheet, an occupational safety, health and working conditions code, and a food standards code.

According to Branca himself, the global crisis we are facing is nothing but a projection of the crisis that "dwells" within us, which informs us that the material world we have built over time is nothing but a multitude of facets of our inner worlds.

Therefore, this crisis offers us the chance for a profound renewal that must first take place within ourselves. Once this change has taken place, we can bring it into the company and it will enable us to overcome the challenges that will arise along the way, thereby restoring, to the organizations themselves, a new prosperity.

Based on the model Branca designed, profit and ethics can and must coexist.

In other words, without profit there can be no return for people and the community itself, but the economic return in this case must always be accompanied by the creation of intangible value that lasts over time, so the company must be conceived as a nucleus capable of generating well-being and prosperity for all its stakeholders. By this logic, the Branca Group has been successful by continuing to thrive and generate value despite the crisis.

Of considerable relevance is the so-called “Argentina Case”, the situation that involved the company's branch located in Argentina. Around the year 2000, many companies were going through a severe crisis, and companies seemed to have only two possibilities: they could either shut down or proceed with the dismissal of most of the workers. In that extreme situation, Branca decided to follow a different, yet apparently risky path, that in the end however, as we shall see further in the paragraph, paid off: he reported to his employees that



he had no intention of closing the company, but that he had taken that difficult time as a challenge worth meeting.

After having carefully explored all the alternatives, the entrepreneur himself realized that he could produce a high-quality bitter at a low cost. Because this bitter was produced by a distiller who was a great connoisseur of rare herbs, it would still have become better than all those produced by competitors.

Thanks to this smart move and the production of a brand-new product, even though the company was not able to grow, it still managed to keep its entire workforce, in fact overcoming the tough situation of default the country was pouring in.

Branca declared that if he had not undergone a process of personal transformation through meditation, he would surely have chosen to minimize the company's workforce while waiting for the situation to improve. If he had done so, he would not have had the courage to see events as an opportunity for growth.

Through his own experience, Branca recognizes the three key skills a conscious leader needs to have to be considered as such:

- Seeing: meaning being able to observe reality in depth for what it is;
- Identifying causes: knowing how to get to the source of the problem, without trying to find temporary solutions to the effects generated;
- Relying on higher creativity: looking within oneself in search of the right path. This is possible when there is space, openness, and silence in the mind.

The story of the Branca case begins with a profound journey of personal transformation of its president Niccolò Branca.

The Branca company was founded in Milan in 1845 by Bernardino Branca and his sons. Bernardino, as a great connoisseur of herbs and roots from all around the globe, began producing the famous “Fernet Branca” (Branca N., 2020).

Niccolò, after finishing his studies, worked in the company for about 10 years, but following a personal and professional crisis in the early 1990s, he left the company and embarked on a path of profound personal research characterized by various stages: from Psychosynthesis, to Theravāda Buddhism with the forest monks, to Zen meditation, to Reiki.

The meeting with a Balinese meditation teacher Luk Ketut Suryani was, according to his words, life changing. This meeting marks the beginning of an inner path of great transformation thanks to which Niccolò Branca begins to work on self-awareness that leads him to touch his essence, the pure consciousness at the center of himself and to experience

how one can, through meditative practice, dwell in the centrality of the self, in the essence of ourselves and from there act.

In this way meditation becomes an important part of his daily routine: Branca with his experience testifies that meditation hooks us into reality rather than escaping it, placing us in it with greater acuity and depth.

As his research progresses, Niccolò Branca does not leave the world of work for good, partly to keep the daily routine alive but also to maintain an equilibrium between the inner quest and the outer world.

Ten years after he left the family business, he was offered the opportunity to re-enter it in order to manage the crisis that the Argentine branch of the company was facing at that time. Thus, Branca felt compelled to show and demonstrate the possibility to do business in a totally different and even innovative way. In fact, his approach represented an attempt to combine two worlds that had always been typically divided: on the one hand the spiritual aspect, hence mindfulness whereas, on the other the matter, thus business.

Niccolò Branca perceived that this was a great chance to give other people what he had acquired and learned in the dimension of doing through practice. In accepting the offer, the entrepreneur himself was aware of the important challenge he was about to face as he was asked to put into practice that wisdom he had cultivated, to give the theorized ways of acting real consistency, with the risk of implementing something he had assimilated on a mindfulness retreat into the world of business which could have encountered several obstacles in its daily implementation in such an environment where methodologies and feelings were completely at odds. This is how he began to build his company.

He first created a Code of Ethics, which is based on the bond of deep and sincere respect between and towards the company's employees, who are to be treated as ends and not as means, and with the unavoidable commitment not to practice any kind of discrimination based on cultural, gender, racial, ideological, etc. differences. This code is also brought to the attention of candidates during the interview so that they understand the company's values and ways of conduct from the outset and decide their willingness to join the project and evaluate their ability to strictly adhere to this set of rules. In addition, an Agreement was drawn up with raw material suppliers who must not only prove to adhere to and respect high quality parameters but must also be able to demonstrate the soil's quality, environmental stewardship, and treatment of workers that must be fair and respectful. This has led to meticulous selection of suppliers with a substantial and consequent increase in costs. The same increase was

brought about by other initiatives such as the drafting of an environmental balance sheet, the establishment of a supervisory body, the creation of a food safety code and a labor safety code. "Fratelli Branca Distillerie" is indeed a profit-seeking company, but it is also a company that was able to realize that objective costs generated by and resulting from the adoption of both a code of ethics and all the other initiatives carried out to achieve well-being at the corporate level, are not only sustainable, but even necessary, becoming an imperative for the organic growth of the company's reality as a whole. This process mirrors the vision Branca has always sustained and promoted, though he wasn't able to implement it successfully, which now, thanks to Niccolò Branca continues to live on and was even improved. As a matter of fact, Branca started to organize the company as it was a true "Living Organism" as he didn't view it as a mere organism of production, instead considered it to be a vibrant reality endowed with a collective soul, made up of all the people who used to work there and those who still thrive, work and collaborate with, for and within the company itself.

As a result, the true entrepreneur is the one who considers his collaborators to be projections of himself and values every single employee working for the company he or she is the leader of equally. If the company management invests in its workers as if they were indispensable parts of the entrepreneur himself, a sense of belonging to the company would follow and ultimately result in genuine team building. It was by following this pillar strategy that Branca began to build interpersonal relationships with his employees in order to identify and acknowledge the positive aspects of their personalities with the goal of putting employees in the position and under the right circumstances for them to express their skills, capabilities and know-how at best, since by only leveraging weaknesses, people will be limited in achieving growth and slow in the development process.

This kind of enlightenment Branca reached through the practice of meditation gave him the opportunity to adopt a holistic view of reality that places human beings and their value at the center and prioritizes people's health and well-being. Niccolò Branca seeks to encourage the freest expression of thought, consequently triggering a climate of ever-increasing creativity. Furthermore, he strives to organize the company in such a way that proactive and assertive people are rewarded for their performances and high levels of commitment.

The portrait of the mindful leader that emerges from the Branca case study is not that of a leader who has simply taken a leadership course, but that of a person who has achieved a significant knowledge of mindfulness and was able to convey a way of being that inspires others.

Branca affirms that everything he has been able to do was brought about by the inner transformation he went through, thanks to which mindfulness meditation becomes a means and stops being an end.

In this sense, by focusing on the deepest essence of oneself and acting from the inside to modify feelings, perceptions and the course of actions rather than trying to change the world from the outside, it is possible to be the best version of ourselves, give our best being aware of the fact that our performance does not define who we are as a person. Moreover, every obstacle and difficulty in completing any task we are assigned to in a casual workday represents and is to be taken as a valuable opportunity for growth. This whole experience enables the development of leadership qualities that originate from a greater connection with one's self, the others and the world, qualities that are expressed through new, positive and productive ways of acting and being. A leader who is able to concentrate on what is happening in the here and now, without being influenced by personal biases and individual preferences, has the capacity to be present, active and reactive that is a much-needed ability in all professional contexts, especially in business. Such leaders manifest a high level of emotional intelligence and empathy, so they are able to motivate their employees even in situations of deep ambiguity and uncertainty.

Daniel Goleman, a famous U.S. psychologist, writer and journalist, in his book "Focus" reviews a multitude of cases in which well-known companies or top managers, because they lacked the above-mentioned indispensable broad and empathic vision, went through resounding failures, despite their high technical or cognitive skills. Again, he states that our brain is governed and controlled by two mechanisms; the Top-down (conscious/intentional) and the Bottom-up (automatic), highlighting how much of our behavior is driven by bottom up impulses and the extent to which automatic processes guide our body (Goleman D., 2013). Proud to be rational humans, we tend to believe that our actions are always guided by self-awareness, reasoning, and free will.

Instead, as demonstrated by Goleman most of the times instincts are much stronger, prevail on rationality and end up guiding us: as a result, we are at the mercy of routines of attitudes and behaviors, often characterized by rigidity and technicality (Goleman D., 2013). These patterns, because of their substantial recursiveness, are totally inadequate to cope with those real-life or business situations that require adaptability, collaboration and creativity.

In particular, in a business context when changes occur and new situations arise requiring the ability to find original solutions to novel problems, these automatic behavioral patterns can be dysfunctional and might become part of the problem.

Mindfulness in this context provides the opportunity to have greater awareness of cognitive, emotional and behavioral routines, and the consequences produced by the automatic behaviors associated with these patterns, help anyone, and particularly leaders, to tap into the natural human capacity, buried under a bunch of repetitive patterns, to encounter experience without the filter of habits and constant perceptual distortions from past knowledge.

In conclusion, I believe the path Branca chose to follow and the results he has accomplished are of exceptional value, especially if contextualized in the late 1990s when concepts such as meditation, mindfulness, and conscious leadership were still virtually unknown.

Branca also took it upon himself to share his experience and his journey in so many contexts, from the academic realm passing through journalism to the web, thus contributing to the increasing spread of new and evolutionary models of leadership in our country.

I also believe that, the fact that he does not focus on a specific type of mindfulness, but he addresses the issue generically, helps the communication and dissemination of the underlying message.

The limit of this case study in my opinion is to be found in that the business transformation takes place mainly through the personal transformation and questioning of the entrepreneur Niccolò Branca: at first there is an inclusion of the company's employees, but it remains quite indirect. For this reason, I believe this is a strategy not easy to be implemented into very big companies such as multinational corporations due to the fact that the model takes on more individual rather than collective proportions and characteristics. In this regard, mindfulness programs should be and are actually being incorporated in multinational companies and can also lead to a bottom-up transformation, thus widespread and full participation of each individual who wants to be part of it in order to build a community (Branca N., 2019).

## **2. Google's case study**

In 2007, the American multinational technology company Google LLC launched a seven-week mindfulness-based leadership training program under the name of "Search Inside Yourself" (SIY), to help its employees tackle the issue of work-related stress. Chade Meng-Tan, an engineer, founded this program because he believed in the positive effects mindfulness at work could have had on both staff members and Google's overall corporate culture.

## 2.1 “Search Inside Yourself” (SIY)

A set of exercises for mental and emotional fitness, his mindfulness program was branded as a "curriculum for emotional intelligence" after some first failures to deliver meditation sessions within the organization (Chade Meng-Tan, 2017).

The program was a huge success right away, enrolling 1,000–1550 Google employees on average each year, and it had a positive impact on employees' stress levels, work performance, and leadership abilities ("Search Inside Yourself Program Impact Report", 2019).

A significant portion of participants gave the program positive ratings, indicating progress in both their personal and professional life.

Because of the program's increasing popularity at Google, Chade Meng-Tan made the decision to expand it in 2012 by founding the nonprofit Search Inside Yourself Institute (SIYI), which provides mindfulness-based trainings to a wide range of businesses operating in various industries.

According to the institute's website, it will train leaders to "handle change, preserve resilience, and encourage growth" in order to “unlock the full potential” of its students. According to the program, “our training has been proved to reduce stress, improve attention, increase peak performance, and improve interpersonal interactions” (Search Inside yourself Leadership Institute, 2022).

SIY is cited for its industry knowledge and empirical findings. Reference is made to the organizational advantages of mindfulness in general (both in terms of productivity and corporate "culture") in order to illustrate the success of the program.

### Mindfulness can create better organizations.

Recent research reveals that these benefits add up to make an impact on organizational culture and effectiveness. Most compelling of these comes from insurance giant Aetna, which developed an internal mindfulness training programs with much support from their CEO Mark Bertolini.

[Aetna Write-up >](#)

[Journal Publication >](#)

36%

reduction in stress levels

62.0

minute increase in production each week

7%

lower healthcare costs

Meng identifies the primary method for boosting emotional intelligence in order to lower personal stress levels and increase productivity at work as mindfulness. A key entrepreneurial skill that fosters the creativity required for capitalism is raising emotional intelligence: "Innovation requires emotional intelligence. Happiness is an emotional ability that influences productivity and creativity. The aim of mindfulness as a governance strategy is described here as a kind of education that aims to enhance both cognitive and emotive skills. Happiness is defined as "an emotional skill," something that can be accessed and learned with the proper instruction, regardless of one's financial situation. One can see how the areas for improvement in this agenda are much more deeply permeated by the subjects' emotional and psychological lives as well as their uniqueness rather than just being material, ideological, or discursive.

Here, individuals take on the role of expert knowledge in governance regimes by being given the skills they need to manage themselves "in accordance" with their "deeper values." This is information that the person "already knows" but that needs to be put into practice.

The technological therapies of corporate welfare approach the problem of governance and self-management as a problem that is primarily centered on production and access to information, much like the ideas of neoliberal statism and economic and psychological behaviorism. Here, the boundaries of knowledge and information processing—recognized as essential to the construction of the topic of interest by both neoliberal theorists and cognitive-behavioral psychologists—are converted into a space of potentiality. According to mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn, practicing mindfulness "continually invites us to embody and thereby actualize the potential in a more constant manner" (Chade Meng-Tan, 2022).

The challenge that drives mindfulness programs like Search Inside Yourself is: How can we access what we already know potentially but not yet concretely? Finding a source of improvement in potentiality is an important aspect of how financial speculation works.

Meng characterizes the SIY model as a plan with "three phases" for putting this knowledge into practice.

The first is mindfulness, which is described as "a method of training the mind to pay attention moment by moment without judgment."

The practice of mindfulness involves "paying attention moment by moment without judgment" and "training attention that permits the mind to become peaceful and clear on demand" (Chade Meng-Tan, 2022).

It is a type of internal behavioral modification that seeks to consciously reroute one's cognitive capability rather than changing the substance of thinking.

"Creating self-mastery" is the second step. One might develop a degree of self-knowledge or self-awareness that advances with time and transforms into self-mastery once the mind is peaceful and clear. "Master your emotions by knowing yourself well enough." Although the notion that self-knowledge results in self-mastery is not new, it is utilized specifically in this context to empower the individual and establish him or her as the creator and ruler of their own lives.

The third component of Meng's Search Inside Yourself program, "creating positive habits of mind," also refers to this depoliticization process.

Despite being distinct from first- and third-wave CBT approaches, which seek to directly alter behavior, mindfulness is designed to purposefully use the capacity of self-control and focus it toward specified objectives. This entails developing nonjudgmental attitudes and "practicing compassion" toward oneself. The laity mindfulness practice promoted by Meng and other authors has a moral obligation at its core, albeit being far from being a fully Buddhist ethic.

The three "skills Search Inside Yourself is aimed to develop"—knowledge and self-mastery gained through mindfulness and actualized through habitual practice—work by boosting emotional intelligence, which, in Meng's words, "creates the circumstances for pleasure."

This translates into productive interpersonal relationships at work that boost people's self-esteem, foster social connections, and maintain group cohesiveness.

Bill Duane, a Google engineer who took part in the Search Inside Yourself initiative, said: "People make up the machine that is business. Problems exist where there are people. There may be fluidity or friction between them" (Kelly C., 2012).

Such mindfulness-based health initiatives like Search Inside Yourself serve as the "essential lubricant between engaged, aspirational personnel and a demanding business culture.", ensuring that both run smoothly, promoting the well-being or self-esteem of employees and the company.

The lubricating effect of mindfulness-based health promotes smooth operation and eliminates friction between the corporate organism and its organs since work environments are social contexts that foster class conflict and collective political demands.

Thus, the main goal of the therapeutic techniques indicated by this corporate governance is to program people in self-management, a manner of "guiding" people to act in a way that serves the cohesion and collective functioning of the entire organization.

It is not totally accidental that neoliberalism's preferred social structure is also this type of governance.



In addition to new methods of population and individual control in support of the life of the organismic whole, neoliberal theories of how to best govern the subject of interest also reflect new modes of subjectification and social/political organization that have permeated all facets of life. Indirectly, through environmental interventions, and internally, through subjective education and interest instillation. An effective method for subject activation backed by behavioral psychology and for the dissemination of neoliberal rationality into the subjective sphere is the practice of mindfulness in its application in business, clinical, educational, or other contexts.

Although it's possible that these programs boost employee productivity and hence boost or raise earnings, their primary goal and driving force is to invest in the well-being of employees and subsequently the business as a whole. While it may have positive effects for the individual worker, this justification appears to be more moral and charitable and serves to conceal the exploitative conditions of labor and employment under neoliberal capitalism. For instance, a mindfulness course or a company-sponsored retreat may help reduce stress and anxiety in the workplace, but it does little to address the sources of stress and anxiety that arise from the workplace and the very nature of work conditions.

The Search Inside Yourself program, according to Chang, provided the solution. "The mindfulness therapeutics Chang encountered in Search Inside Yourself were not aimed at improving his condition, but at improving his well-being, thus making him more amenable to the very conditions responsible for the deterioration of his physical, mental, and even family health," reads the program's description.

The dependency and determination of the subject on the outside, as well as the misery brought on by the material conditions of employment, are frequently acknowledged by proponents of mindfulness, but they do so only to deny any responsibility or power to change these situations. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, "workers are obliged to cope as best they can using their own resources because many job descriptions will not be changed in the short run to lessen employee stress".

The importance of mindfulness in the workplace is an obvious illustration of how effective positive investments can coexist with or be appropriated by conservative, exploitative, or oppressive regimes that are fundamentally opposed to sustained individual or community well-being. Because it does not assume a primary actor or class to oppose and does not reveal a specific purpose, this cannot be adequately explained by a Marxist theory of exploitation, ideology, or commodification. For example, it would be incorrect to claim that the welfare industry can be entirely explained by corporations commodifying welfare for profit. It is more

in line with Michel Foucault's description of governmentality as an interaction between techniques of power and techniques of the self, working not only through techniques of domination aimed at profit or techniques of subjectification that change the worker's body and consciousness, making them a productive source of capital, but also as a more thorough and speculative process of valorization that produces credit and enhances the "well-being" of the worker.

### **3. SAP's case study**

One of the most prosperous businesses in Germany is SAP. Since its founding in 1972, it has grown to be a multinational enterprise software corporation with offices in 180 different nations and more than 400,000 clients. Its dedication to employee well-being is and has been a key factor to its success.

#### **3.1 How Employee Well-being Boosts the Bottom Line**

Evidence proves that investing in employee well-being can pay off financially. Additionally, when businesses prioritize employee well-being as a fundamental business strategy rather than only as a means to reduce employers' healthcare expenses, it can result in real returns on investment (ROI) through increased engagement, decreased attrition, and increased productivity.

The improvement of the health and quality of life of SAP's workforce is regarded as a key business enabler. Employee well-being is perceived by SAP's Co-CEOs and board leadership as a strategic goal that is planned, measured, and improved upon, in contrast to organizations that delegate employee issues to HR departments because it affects SAP's bottom line earnings.

According to Dr. Natalie Lotzmann, Global Head of Health & Well-Being Management at SAP, "We don't pretend that employee well-being is only about making employees happier and healthier." It aids SAP's expansion into a more prosperous business. We do this by emphasizing the connection between SAP's commercial success and profit and our workplace culture and investments in employee well-being.

SAP employees obviously enjoy their jobs, in part due to the company's positive workplace culture, management style, and well-being initiatives. SAP received the 2019 Best Places to Work Award from Glass Door, which also ranked it as Germany's "Number One Best Place to

Work." With 175 honors in 2018 alone, SAP has won employee recognition awards from all over the world.

SAP approaches health from a whole-person perspective. Its onsite health services offer a variety of medical and psychiatric services, emergency management, a return-to-work program, and health education.

Through employees' stories of success, health and wellness awareness campaigns, and promoting regional SAP efforts around the world, the firm also promotes a positive workplace culture. 90% of its global workforce is covered by its Health Ambassador Network, which discusses best practices and supports employee well-being.

SAP offers child conferences, parent coaching courses, and on-site childcare facilities in a number of locations as well as daycare services. When returning to work following maternity and paid family leave with full pay and benefits, moms can restrict their work schedules during the first four weeks. New parents can take up to six weeks of paid family leave.

Flex time programs, like SAP's Flex Appeal in the US, provide employees with flexible working hours which can be modified according to personal conditions and issues in order to lower employee stress and improve work-life balance. Employees can buy nutritious, sealed, pre-cooked meals through the "SAP Dinner to Go" app and pick them up in the canteen after work thanks to SAP's well-known Dinner to Go program.

SAP prioritizes the mental wellness of its workers. Its Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being Program campaign encourages staff members to seek the (early) assistance they require while also increasing awareness of mental health concerns and lowering stigma. As part of a drive to encourage employee mental health, SAP employees read and enthusiastically welcomed an employee story on "Surviving Depression" as a vital component of the program. In order to assist employees better manage daily stress and be more focused, productive and creative at work, SAP also provides mindfulness and emotional intelligence programs called Search Inside Yourself that are taught by more than 9,000 professional practitioners. There is a worldwide waiting list of 8,000 employees for the programs due to their popularity (Purcell J., 2021).

SAP never loses sight of the primary goal of its employee well-being initiatives, which is to develop a more robust and successful business. Its yearly Business Health Culture Index (BHCI) measures employee well-being and analyzes business results of its well-being initiatives, such as rising employee engagement and productivity.

When SAP started asking employees to rate their personal health and well-being, the BHCI was born. The poll was broadened by the firm in 2014 to investigate the relationship between

operational profit, staff retention, and operating profit as well as the role that SAP's workplace climate plays in achieving challenging corporate objectives.

This BHCI compiles employee responses (on a scale of 1 to 5) in seven different categories and calculates the results of an annual online employee survey. From "I am glad to work for SAP," "The high demands of my profession do not interfere with my private life," to "Compared to others my age, I am in good health," statements range in sentiment. In 2018, almost 72,000 employees took part, translating to a 73% response rate.

With the use of corporate data analysis and tested statistical calculations, SAP is now able to show the financial effects of major well-being indicators. There are no disputing SAP's well-being initiatives' business benefits.

According to the SAP Integrated Report, the company's well-being initiatives have improved its Business Health Culture Index from 69% in 2013 to 78% in 2018, with each 1% improvement in the Index having an impact on operating profit of \$90-\$100 Million (EU).

SAP programs help to improve leadership trust, employee engagement, and absenteeism while also improving employee mental wellness. Participants in the mindfulness program at work have reported higher job satisfaction, clearer thinking, and enhanced creativity. For free, round-the-clock assistance with mental health, employees can dial a helpline. All employees and their families have access to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is available everywhere.

The reason SAP is a global leader in employee well-being can be attributed to its purposeful and organized approach to human capital. Leadership is what actually sets SAP different. Employee well-being is prioritized by the CEO, Board of Directors, and front-line managers, who also make sure that SAP's culture supports it as a key business goal.

"The physical and mental wellness of our team is paramount," said recently departed CEO Bill McDermott. "If our people don't take care of their health, ultimately everything else suffers, and I want everyone at SAP to have a dream job. I want people to be happy and to be inspired to have a thrilling career. The people who power this company are the most important part of it" (Purcell J., 2019).

## Conclusions

To draw conclusions, the discussion revolves around the profound dichotomy that characterizes the phenomenon of mindfulness applied to the world of business. As the present dissertation explores in fact, mindfulness is on the one hand an individual practice people should care about and ask for in order to cope with stress in general, but more specifically to manage the work-related kind of burden that arises because of many reasons but is often caused by companies themselves, on the other hand it is a set of techniques promoted by organizations that should be embraced by all the members within that specific organization as to benefit the collective dimension of the company itself that would in turn have more positive outcomes as each individual has undergone a process of transformation and the overall levels of stress, anxiety, burnout have decreased to leave room for productivity, well-being and thriving performances. Still unsure of the answer, the debate continues on discussing whether mindfulness is adopted by and implemented in companies to promote employee well-being or instead to foster and enhance productivity having as the ultimate aim that of profit maximization. In this sense, one thing is certain, they are one the consequence of the other meaning that if employees are given the possibility to let go of stress through mindfulness training, levels of stress within an organization will most likely reduce with a collateral improvement in the working environment, enhanced employee performances and increased overall well-being of individuals who may find themselves in the position to feel more committed to the organization's goals and more thriving in achieving results. Thus, even if first adopted and thought of as a well-being-oriented strategy in which employees are cared about and represent the focus of the firm's interests, mindfulness always masks and hides the pursuit of wealth all companies worldwide, no matter the distinctive features that make them unique, chase. What seems to be sure though is the fact that mindfulness is not and can't be conceived as a long-term solution as it helps people keep symptoms of stress and feelings of anxiety under control, but still, it doesn't solve the several underlying sources of stress that, being complex and elaborated, must be dealt with and addressed in a much more complete manner. Therefore, mindfulness risks becoming a temporary panacea which should then be supported or followed by more concrete and relevant changes aimed at tackling the issues as to resolve them definitively. In other words, shouldn't companies adopt policies, create workplaces, establish working conditions and design jobs in such a way that prevents them from being the cause of work-related stress in the first place? Moreover, firms should invest in job-design processes in order to put employees in the right position, under the most

preferable circumstances for them to flourish and express their personal skills and know-how at best, which in the end, will have a positive impact on the company's results and will pave the way for its success. Most importantly, the link between mindfulness and the varieties of capitalism serves as a way to offset the lack of adequate, fair, clear organizational and social structures within modern organizations which contributes to a large extent to the rise of work-related stress.

What is particularly noteworthy is the resilience-change type of discourse with resilience being defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as “the ability to be happy, successful etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened” (Cambridge Dictionary., n.d.) and identified by the Merriam-Webster as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to change” (Merriam-Webster., n.d.). It is important to concentrate on this matter because we live in a fast changing and continuously evolving society in which we are pushed to be resilient, thus, to face change, overcome the shock brought about by change itself and move on as if the stress and the oppressing conditions they experienced were totally irrelevant. Now, the questions are: how desirable can it be to promote resilience in workers exposed to stress? To what extent and until when stress can be tolerated? And again, shouldn't there be a need to break with resilience? This is the point, mindfulness instead of being a means through which employees are forced to deal with stress, could represent a real turning point in the history of business as it might be crucial in making employees think about their lives, priorities and needs. As a result, given that mindfulness is the practice of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, J., 1994), this introspective kind of analysis thanks to which workers, and more in general people, become more aware of their value, realize their needs and comprehend the importance of the capabilities they have might give birth to the willingness of employees to stop being resilient, to stop having to deal with problems on the surface and to start wanting to change things from its foundations. The hope is not to be resilient, to actively contribute to the improvement of one's own life and working conditions without continuing to be subjugated by capitalistic market logics that aim both at the resistance of factors such as productivity and the smooth operation of the company. Another possible effect of mindfulness implemented within organizations at the international level could be a strong desire of workers to break with the

past. By practicing mindfulness, people are able to dive deep into their souls, to experience their feelings, to listen to their emotions and needs, as a result they undergo a process of self-awareness that leads not only to increased awareness and consciousness but also to seeing oneself differently, valuing more one's own skills and capabilities that in the end results in the desire to have more because knowing to deserve more. Therefore employees might end up, thanks to mindfulness, realizing that the working conditions they were subject to, obeyed to follow are not sustainable and bearable anymore, and they might ask for more rights, diverse and better working conditions and at the same time, pretend more because of the value they hold as workers, but more than all as people.

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